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A SHORT INTRODUCTION  
TO THE STUDY OF  
FRENCH LITERATURE.

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By  
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1910.



LONDON: FRANCIS GRIFFITHS,  
34, MAIDEN LANE, STRAND, W.C.





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# A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF FRENCH LITERATURE.

"LITERATURE," says M. de Bonald, "is the expression of society." Napoléon I. could not separate literature from the life (as a whole) of peoples: their books he found "magnanimes quand le peuple est grand; vicieux, frivoles ou insensés quand il se corrompt et s'abaisse."

Lamartine says of peoples: "Their memory begins with their literature."

For Lemercier literature is the all-in-all, in which and from which and into which all is, comes, goes.

Voltaire said: "les feuilles volantes sont la perte de la littérature."

Guizot thinks that plastically and æsthetically modern letters are inferior to the old, superior as regards sentiments, profundity, and deep-set ideas.

I have quoted these Frenchmen in the forefront of my Notes, as they give in their own incomparable way what we can only express as strangers, less well and, to the French, outlandishly. They have been cited, too, in their prose (original or translated). French prose, to many of us foreigners (i.e., non-French), is exquisite, nearly always. French verse generally pleases us less, often very much less. Thus, I should as soon turn to Wordsworth as to François Coppée, just dead, and my opinion of that

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Subjective poet is E. A. Poe's. So I have not touched on Coppée. And prose writers have probably been more fully and more often discussed (*mollissimo brachio*) in these Short Notes than poets. To my poor thinking, some French prose is the nearest sublunar approach to perfection which I know. And I have handled it, or tried to handle it, as Walton, "meek "Walton," counselled to handle the worm. For the beginning, if it is thought that perhaps I have avoided the *Chanson de Roland*, *Romans de Troie* and *d'Alexandre*, *Chanson d'Antioche*, *Lancelot du Lac*, *Berthe aux grands piés*, the Celtic (Breton and British) remains that have come down to us and such verses as, in tens of thousands, still cumber the libraries, I have done so deliberately. Vanity of vanities is Celtic study, as I know to my cost. The dilettante may toy with it, but it is time lost. I pray you, eschew it. My order, too, is not strictly chronological. But it is so fairly. In the immense period run over one could, of course, only pick names here and there and make a pen-and-ink sketch, so to say. A poet or two and of *prosateurs* a handful have been caught, as it were, on the wing. The French view has been ever taken, perhaps, in preference to the British. And that, also, deliberately, to persuade the reader, if reader I have, to Gallicise in his French literature opinions. Of course, once more, the French Government is not France. The official estimate of, say, Zola, or Chateaubriand, or Anatole France is not necessarily that of the majority of *littérateurs* in their own country. Here will be found no politics, it is hoped, and no *parti pris* in religion or morality. The only standpoint has been

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that of Art, of Æstheticism. These last know nothing of Radical or Réactionnaire, of Catholicism or Atheism, of Naturalism or Realism. I have nowhere suggested that Christianity inaugurated the Cult of the Ugly. Nowhere will Paganism and Decadence be found bracketed. Surely, Literature is Catholic, in the Greek sense. And French literature is naturally subsumed under the *chef* of Literature, unless haply we think that men of Gaul are sinners above all men.

## I. Celts and the Villon Cult.

THAT genial, if feeble, folk, the *Celtomane*, arrogates to itself all the realm of dream known, not as French Literature but, as *Chanson de geste* and its congeners, lost to civilised intelligence since the days of Louis XI. The Cycle of Brittany and *contes de la Bibliothèque bleue*, who can away with them? Miracles, Mysteries, Moralities are as a tale that is told and will bear no re-telling. I stop, then, at Villon (1431-1484), Villon the vagabond, the scamp, what you will, if you but dub him poet. This Paris *apache* only saved his neck from the thief's halter by knowing a fellow-poet—our prisoner for twenty-five years—Charles of Orleans (1). An out-and-out black-guard is no *poseur*, as somebody has aptly remarked, and "R.L.S." finds his rascality pall on him. François still awaits a white-washer, but Rabelais and others have fathered on him tales of two other malefactors. That François Rabelais should so treat François Villon is natural in a *curé* of Meudon revenging the death of a priest, and demands—perhaps has received—the reprobation of the Villon Society. At this time of day, nobody wishes for the "neiges "d'antan" proverbial tag, and the poet's *Will* is too well-known, but one passage of the *Grand Testament* may possibly be adduced, if only to show that Rennes, in Brittany, was known before the Dreyfus trial

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(1) In the poesy of Charles d'Orléans, M. Gérusez sees an aftermath of the XIV. Century, an aftermath harvested thanks to a stray sunbeam from Italy—thanks, that is, to Valentine of Milan.

## CELTS AND THE VILLON CULT.

[His "honneste mort" must have been soon after October 2, 1461, when he left the gaol of Meung sur Loire (Loiret).]

Puys que pape, roys, filz de roys,  
Et concenz en ventres de roynes  
Sont enseveliz, morts et froidz,  
En aultruy mains passent leurs resnes,  
Moy, pauvre mercerot de Renes,  
Mourray-je pas? Ouy, se Dieu plaist;  
Mais, que j'aye faict mes estrenes,  
Honneste mort ne me deplaist (1).

Many will have remarked how, in a passage well enough known to warrant its non-citation, the bard bequeaths his big spectacles, and gushes into poetry upon the chief God's Acre of Paris. "There lie lords" and ladies, fed delicately on cream and flummery or "rice—sweet Jesus, deign to shrive them!" And this prayer we may perhaps breathe in favour of one whose verse, with more self-reliance and more regular execution, would be as admirable in the Twentieth as it was in the Fifteenth Century. Jean de Meung reminds us by a curious coincidence of Villon's last (known) prison. Jean, or Clopinel (2), was the literary executor of "le roman de la Rose,"

"Où l'art d'aimer est tout enclose."  
And like unto it is the "roman de renard."

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(1) *Grand Testament, Balade*, p. 37.

(2) Jean de Meung, says M. Nisard, "a flétri la rose en la cueillant." Guillaume de Lorris, in imitating and translating Ovid, does not make such a Bottom of poor Naso. And to make his sin worse, Jean lived in the time of Dante!

## II. The Sire de Joinville.

BUT one must drag oneself away from poesy, for a look at prose in the Middle Ages. The former becomes famous even in the Eleventh Century; whereas in France, as elsewhere, *sermo pedester* took another couple of hundred years to mature. La Fontaine explains that prose is as hard to handle as verse; and certainly, in the absence of political and religious eloquence and in the presence of all-permeating Latin, French unrhymed composition had to languish until the Crusades. These made themselves spoken of "even in my lady's chamber," says Joinville. So *place aux dames* and *place au Sire de Joinville!* The curse of modernism has ruined his text, now happily restored with fair accuracy, and his old age has marred parts of his *Vie de Saint Louis*. But the Life, or *Histoire*, is charming in its imperfection—"completest while incomplete," like the child or the rosebud. Gaston Paris calls it one of the most precious bequests of the Middle Ages. In time, it is a half-way house between Villehardouin and Froissart, of whom the former was born (1150) in the Champagne whose sénéchal was Jean de Joinville (1224-1319). Like Disraeli the Younger, Joinville retouched his work, e.g. his *Credo* after 37 years. Like Villehardouin and unlike Froissart, Jean told what he had himself seen—well, when the events were freshly graved in his memory; ill, when upwards of eighty years old. To Frenchmen the passage in the *Histoire* touching his

## THE SIRE DE JOINVILLE.

*prestres*, or chaplain, has ever appeared delicious. It is surely characteristic.

"Now the sickness of the host had gotten me. . .  
"And so it was that my priest sang me Mass before  
"my bed in my tent, and had the sickness that I  
"had. Now it came to pass that in his holy rite  
"he fainted. And when I saw that he was fain to  
"fall, girt as I was I leaped from my bed and did  
"catch him in mine arms, in such sort that eftsoon  
"and right bravely he did his holy rite . . . he  
"came to himself and did his rite and sang his Mass  
"thoroughly, nor sang it ever more thereafter."

An eye-witness of St. Louis' 1248-1254 campaign, he becomes curiously and cunningly involved when the 1250 accident of Mansourah imprisonment has to be detailed. As the Egyptian town, now very clean and still showing the house where Louis IX. was in durance, has nothing much else to boast of, the royal incarceration should have been well described and fully. But it is in detail that Joinville is often wanting. Elegant he is not, nor nervous and solid as Villehardouin; but he leaves little to desiderate on the score of running, easy *causerie*. **Geoffroy, Seigneur de Villehardouin**, who died in Messinople, a fief of the Constantinople Latin Empire, in 1213, was also a chronicler, not a historian.



### III. Froissart.

TO read Villehardouin in his old French garb is a purgatory to the general reader; and Froissart, who lived from the Thirties of the XIV. to the closing first decade of the XV. Century, is not an author to offer for C. S. Examinations at random, as a whilom friend of the writer's found to his cost. **Jean Froissart** writes largely from hearsay of Crécy and Poitiers, of Calais and Duguesclin, but always with an eye to princely favour and hospitality. To him the Unities and chronological order were as closed books as the Salian Chant to Horace. A prose Pindar, he wrote for courts, and ran the gamut of chase and *tournoi* and feast and festival. The *Job*, xxxix., 19 (p. 217) of Quevedo y Villegas may be applied to him, where the Spaniard says: "En el confuso rumor de cajas y instrumentos de la guerra el tropel de sus galopes pronuncia 'Cierra.' Erizadas las crines y atentas las orejas, anticipadamente percibe las señas de la batalla, los movimientos de los reyes, la aclamacion de los soldados." His History was Sir Walter Scott's *liber carissimus*, dramatic, Homeric, vivid. Of course, he copied from another Jean, one Le Bel, Canon of Liége; spent largely where vintners were concerned, on palfreys and greyhounds and cates. But perhaps we may forgive him, as the first country he visited was England and as he did not espouse the Gallic cause against the British. Besides, even our own Keats also has sung lovingly of "dance and Provençal song," such as the ballades, rondeaux, and



## FROISSART.

virelais of Froissart, which leaven North French letters with a tang of the *félibriges*. He died, in or about 1410, at Chimay, Hainaut, after his return from a visit to our Second Richard, a prince long wedded to French ideas of men and things.

And what are we to say of **Philippe de Comines** (1445? to 1511)? One is not concerned here with his rôle as courtier in Bourgogne or under Louis XI., Charles VIII., and Louis XII. Still less need his "iron cage" episode interest us. But the difficulty is to fix this amphibious writer, little or nothing a chronicler and largely or altogether a historian. From the chronicling trio just mentioned, Villehardouin, Froissart and Joinville, he is miles apart, perhaps superior to any one of them. For he really wrote *history*, dull comparatively, but deep. In language and style he is of the Middle Ages, modern in ideas and judgment. Froissart's *chef-d'œuvre* (and that of the XIV. Century, say some) was his *Chroniques*; de Comines', the *Mémoires*. In the latter we trace the firm hand of the strenuous politician, the insight and profundity of a philosopher—or of what then passed muster as such.

## IV. Rabelais and Calvin.

WITH Philippe de Comines, then, I bridge the great gulf fixed between 1453 (which closes the Hundred Years War and the Middle Ages) and Modern France—Italianised in and after 1498. For the next fifty years we find hardly more than two *prosateurs* of genius, **Calvin and Rabelais**, *par nobile fratrum!* and but one poet, Clément Marot. Bossuet quotes Calvin's fairly just, if vain, estimate of his own style: "driving home an argument and pregnant brevity." This is in the *Histoire des Variations* (lib. ix., 55), which fastens on Calvin's "sad" manner of writing, but allows to the Burner of Servetus "cette gloire d'avoir aussi bien "écrit qu'homme de son siècle." Eloquence and condensation and imagery are blended in the *Institution chrétienne*, as done into French in 1540. And that by the confession of men little flattered by Calvin's amenities: "chien," "phrénétique," "grosse beste," and apostrophes of that ilk. To be sure, that was the age of unmeasured invective. Thus, for Calvin, Rabelais is among the *gaudisseurs*, and Calvin for Rabelais is "démoniacle, imposteur qui est en admiration à tous les gents écervelés." Probably both the Picard and the Tourangeau only wished to tickle the ears of the groundlings, and all this summer lightning of words was harmless as your lawyers' mutual vituperations followed by libations in common and by perfect peace. The "sad" stylist and the Prince of Buffoonery were both read. The first is one of Pasquier's "fathers of our language," the second is,

## RABELAIS AND CALVIN.

the same Pasquier says, "to be perused for our profit and our laughter." And as the *Institution* is Calvin's masterpiece, so *Gargantua* bears the palm in the realm of mockery. Indeed, it is the very exaggeration of that mockery, the outside rind of accumulated adjective, the profusion of learned "show off" that have kept sweet and perennially new the Meudon *curé's* kernel of good sense. Meantime the "dé-moniacle" has become diabolically old fashioned. But *Gargantua* has enlisted the sincerest flatterers, and among his royal recruits are Molière, La Fontaine and Voltaire, to name but these. La Bruyère's *Caractères* avow that Rabelais' work is "a riddle that no man may rede, a monstrous amalgam of subtle *morale* and foul festering. When bad, he transcends the worst; when good, he is food for the Gods." And so evidently is Beelzebub the Prince of this World that each Bowdlerised Rabelais is worse than its predecessor. There was one, 150 years ago, by the Abbé de Marsy, and another (Souillac) is still coming out in parts to-day, to the greater ridicule of Senator Berthelot's France! The *Annales Rabelaisiennes*, we know, exist, and perhaps serve a useful purpose. But they *explain* Rabelais, and therein they sin grievously. "It is right earth," as my Lord of Verulam would complain. When M. Alcofribas, in 1535, took away the key of knowledge, "la clef de *ces choses abscondes*," he did it wittingly and with his tongue in his cheek. *Gargantua* is, or he is not, Francois I.; Pantagruel, Antoine de Bourbon; Panurge, some cardinal or other. But really our François had his deal with the *genus* Man, whose inmost fibres feel the doctor-priest's scalpel, unerring,

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unpitying. So that it was doubly unkind of this restorer of the Amadis, the Florestans and the Philocopes—instead of aiding, to “throw stones into the “garden ” of Calvin, in Henri Estienne’s phrase. The pair are inseparable in chronologic literature. M. Nisard has happily said—and it is the conclusion of the whole matter: “Les deux grandes sources qui doivent “renouveler l’esprit Français vont s’épandre à grands “flots. La Renaissance nous donnera Rabelais; la “Réforme nous donnera Calvin.”

## V.

### The Princess and her Valet.

THESE two mighty names are enough even for the reign of a François I. But that monarch's sister must have a word. She sheltered the Reformers, favoured the Renaissance, and, of course, wrote poetry. But **Marguerite de Valois'** title to passing mention is her plagiarism of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. She reduced, it is true, the ten days to seven. But that is *de rigueur* now-a-days, also. Thus, in the last two years, I have thrice found the Plagues of Egypt reckoned as seven (1). But Marguerite (1492-1549) shows originality in her execution, grace and delicacy. Her *Heptameron* has been called "le premier ouvrage en prose qu'on puisse lire sans l'aide d'un vocabulaire," and Gruget, her first publisher, waxing bold, finds that she surpasses her original. *Credat Judæus*. Her brother, *Père et Restaurateur des lettres*, died in 1547, whereupon she abandoned the Muses, and died herself two years later.

About 1518, probably in the autumn of that year, François I. had given this sister, then Duchess of Alençon, a *valet de chambre*, **Clément Marot**. Marot was more a poet than his mistress, more a valet than Jean Jacques, less *marotique* than La Fontaine. With his *style marotique*, however, his badinage, his special *formes* and *sui generis* colour we have to do exclusively. His valour at Pavia (February 24, 1525); his

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(1) Also A. Daudet's *Sapho* so reduces them.

## THE STUDY OF FRENCH LITERATURE.

eating bacon in Lent next year, when they "sweetly" nailed him up in Chartres prison; his flight to Venice and repatriation (1536); his qualmless Sternhold-and-Hopkinsism (what S. François de Sales calls his "rimaillerie ridicule" of 50 Psalms)—these are but Stations in a Vita Dolorosa. His quintessence, as Rabelais might say, was what Boileau characterises in him, "badinage avec une suprême élégance." Even Racine, in an epigram on *Iphigénie*, has not disdained to *marotise*.

But French was to be proved "capable of higher and better style," as Joachim du Bellay (1524-1560) phrased it. With Horace, du Bellay bade men turn by night and day to Greek (and Latin), devoting to the Jeux Floraux of Toulouse the "rondeaux, ballades, "virelais, chants royaux, chansons et autres épiceries "qui corrompent le goût de notre langue" (spelling modernised). This was in 1549. The Brigade (*company*) followed, re-named the Pléiade, from the Πλειὰς of Ptolemy Philadelphus at Alexandria and from its imitation by Charlemagne. In 1549, too, the Italian Sonnet (1) made its French début, under female inspiration this time, whatever may be the truth about the "Shakespearean Sonnets." "Vous eussiez dit "que ce temps-là estoit du tout consacré aux Muses," writes the contemporary Estienne Pasquier.

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(1) Others attribute its naturalisation in France to Saint-Gelais. Similarly, there is no certainly about the names of *Pléiade* members.

## VI. Ronsard.

AND the Muses, too, gave France at this epoch the *Ode*, but through Ronsard. **Pierre de Ronsard** (1524-1585) has quite recently been newly appraised by George Wyndham. To Pierre, as to us all, the Gods have given good and evil. But the good is overwhelming. His lines were fallen on pleasant places even, one had almost said, up to the *ultima linea vitæ*. He laid, says Sainte-Beuve, "the foundations of the poetic revolution that altered the future of our language and "poetry." Boileau is severe :

Ronsard, qui le (Marot) suivit, par une autre méthode,  
Réglant tout, brouilla tout, fit un art à sa mode,  
Et toutefois longtemps eut un heureux destin.  
Mais sa muse, en français parlant grec et latin,  
Vit dans l'âge suivant, par un retour grotesque,  
Tomber de ses grands mots le faste pédantesque.

Boileau's severity is just, provided we remember Ronsard's happy inspirations on occasion and the impetus he gave to poeticism. Another of the Pléiade, **Belleau**, *painter of Nature*, in the Chief's parlance, aimed lower, eschewed pedantry and cultivated a pretty *gentillesse*, something wrinkled, according to Géroze, save for his sparkling *Avril*.

Avril, l'honneur et des bois  
Et des mois,  
Avril, la douce espérance  
Des fruits qui sous le coton  
Du bouton  
Nourrissent leur jeune enfance.



## THE STUDY OF FRENCH LITERATURE.

Another Ronsardist is **Régnier** (1573-1613), simple, nervous and roguish. Too cynical, perhaps, he yet improved on the Master by holding fast to the toward and putting away the untoward. Marot seems alive again in some of Régnier's work. Mathurin Régnier is thus the forerunner, unconscious but real, of Malherbe, of cadence and "the right word in the right place." The reform of Malherbe smacks, "*all portions kept*," of Alexander Pope's among us. Each in some sort "*réduisit la muse aux règles du devoir*." Ronsard closes the XVI. and Malherbe opens the XVII. Century. The two following specimens give Ronsard at his best and worst, respectively :—

- I. Cà, page, ma lyre,  
Je veux faire bruire  
Ses languettes d'or ;  
La divine grâce  
Des beaux vers d'Horace  
Me plaît bien encor.
- II. O cuisse-né, archète, hymérien . . .  
Nourrit-vigne, aime-pampre . . .

Luckily for Ronsard, Muretus in 1553 began expounding him unto the vulgar: Bentley's scholia must be less grateful to the gentle shade of the "Lady of Christ's."



## VII.

### To Hell or the Dictionary.

CONTEMPORARY with Ronsard was **Henri Estienne** (1532—1598), son of Robert, the printer. The *Thesaurus Græcæ linguæ* exists still and will exist, however much Henri's identity may be hidden by later works incorporating him. His French works were only written to recruit himself withal after his Classics. His *Précurrence du langage français* (1579) supplements du Bellay's *Défense et Illustration*, but is as curious as his *Apologie pour Hérodote* is, in its way, atrocious. The moral effect of this last and the financial ruin of the *Thesaurus* crushed him over a quarter of a century before death claimed him. But no posthumous pains of Hell can have touched him. In his life he was purged of sin by lexicography: God

condenda . . . lexica mandat.

damnatis, pœnam pro pœnis omnibus unam.

And it was for us, then, ungrateful wretches that we are, putting off Greek from us as an accursed thing, that Henry Stephanus died in a pauper bed in Lyon! It was for us, whose Latin is comparatively little and whose Greek is *nil*, that *principes* poured from the Paris press of Stephens! It is a small thing, it seems, that we Moderns learn no modern language, while Classics are anathema. Meantime, the Professors of English at English Universities have to learn their native tongue in Germany!

## THE STUDY OF FRENCH LITERATURE.

A question seems here not unnatural. We may not, cannot answer it. We are too far away from the men in point of time. But, standing in thought at that bedside in Lyon, where Estienne died in disgrace with Fortune, we may ask: What relation is there, or is there any relation, between the Renaissance and Protestantism? In other words, why did the placid occupation of emending texts end in Stephanus' peregrinations and poverty?

At the first blush there seems no connexion between the New Learning and the New Religion. But, then, both *were* new; and—the old barriers of Catholicism, on the one hand, and of uniformly bad texts (classical), on the other, once broken—came the deluge. Aristotle is now to be had in his own original Greek, or something approaching to this; the Arab and Jewish copies are antiquated *ipso facto*. The Pope is seemingly wrong over the Indulgences. "Away with Arabic "Aristotles, crucify the Bishop of Rome!"

This is absolutely illogical, but passing natural in the Many-headed Beast of Plato (read in an *editio princeps*, or not at all!).

And that Beast hath power even over gentlemen, your Estienne, your Palissy, your Agrippa d'Aubigné. In the rush and crush the calmest and best-born often fall or are hurried along.

False analogy and undue extension of reasoning can do much. "The Indulgences are wrong; *argal*, all "the Pope does is wrong."

Or: "Aristotle rules Philosophy; Rome, Religion." Aristotle, we now see, did not believe in a Divine

## TO HELL OR THE DICTIONARY.

Providence watching us personally ; so he is all that Bacon dubs him in contempt.

Rome and the Stagirite stand or fall together ; Rome is as infected as he.

This again is absurd, but plausible.

Sophisms, flaws in reasoning, paralogisms are hidden by a man's self-deception often.

And such self-deception is common in violent partisans. Thus d'Aubigné (1552-1630) thought he babbled in Hebrew in his tender years. For him, in his *Tragiques*, all Huguenots are the victims and all Catholics Jack Ketches. Unfortunately, however, the *Tragiques* forget to say what the *Mémoires* forget to conceal : Agrippa d'Aubigné himself had butchered in cold blood 22 Catholic soldiers who had surrendered without fighting. And this is the militant theologian whom France calls the Gallic Juvenal ; who lay buried in his own endless repetitions, incoherence and obscurity ; whom Victor Hugo in 1852 resurrected partly and partially, by copying in his *Châtiments* many of Agrippa's faults.

## VIII.

### Montaigne and Malherbe.

INDEED the whole XVI. Century boasts but few first-class men. Of these **Montaigne** and **Malherbe** represent the prose and poetry, respectively, of 1533-1592 and of 1555-1628. And what prose! Shandean ὑστερον πρότερον, remarks like "J'ajoute, mais je ne corrige pas," the Preface of Book iii. hidden away in the ninth chapter! All this, too, is as deliberate as putting off Tristram's birth until the end of the second volume. Sterne and Montaigne both travelled in France and Italy, and both travels were published in the closing XVIII. Century. Yorick and Michel Eyquem are, each after his kind, Pyrrhonists or Sceptics, or may be taken for such. The *Essais* are a Philosophy of Doubt, that bed whose double pillow for well-shaped heads is deliciously soft and hight "ignorant indifference" (or "indifferent ignorance"). In the *Essais* all Montaigne's ideas focus in Man, studied more theoretically than by Rabelais and as a Freer Agent than by Calvin. All that Amyot had of good, the Mayor of Bordeaux says better; more varied, he is as exact as Calvin; he is as free and delightful as Rabelais, but without the jargon. Life is an Abbey of Thelema, where Man may do what he lists. But, whereas in the curé of Chinon, "Thelema" spells the Φρόνημα σαρκὸς of the XXXIX. Articles, the same word in the Seigneur de Montaigne has almost Aristotle's connotation of προαίρεσις βίου. Another

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*trait* of Aristotelianism in him has been happily touched by Nisard, moderation, *μετριότης*. "C'est surtout par cette modération admirable que les *Essais* de Montaigne sont le premier ouvrage de la prose française. Beaucoup même le regardent comme le premier ouvrage de génie, dans l'ordre du temps." This book, first in seniority among popular works, confronts Man with himself in every time and every clime. It studies Man methodically, i.e., as methodically as Montaigne's mad arrangement allows. The *Essais* are no memoirs, they are nothing didactic. They are neither himself; nor Amyot, who raised him (he says) from the Slough of Despond of ignorance; nor the Plutarch he cites *ad infinitum*; nor Seneca. They are nothing, and they are all. Cursed bitterly by Balzac, found impious by Port Royal, treated worse than a Jesuit by Pascal, the "pernicious, immoral, obscene" *Essais* became suddenly cleansed towards the close of the XVII., and even properly appreciated in the XVIII., Century. Montaigne seems to have played the rôle of Pylades (or Orestes) to the Orestes (or Pylades) of **Étienne de la Boétie**, who, at 16, appears to have been as strong on Plutarch as was his friend when much older. Another pupil and companion was **Pierre Charron**, moralist and theologian, lawyer and priest, preacher and self-styled successor of the views of the *Essais*. Whatever the ideas of the Montaigne School may have been—and they seem to have suffered from flux, even as the Euripus or the Gospel character—the Master was *hors de pair* as a writer. In the XVI. Century "Eclipse is first and the rest nowhere." He taxed himself with Gasconing

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his French, called himself simple, swore soothly that he could not pot-boil without his chronicler of Choeronea. But all this is "pretty Fanny's way," and this pretty Fanny is nothing if not *maligne*. As a fact, the style is chastened to the utmost; exact thoughts are couched in kingly raiment; conceived by a poetic mind, his ideas shine forth living and graphic. What Cardinal du Perron called "le *bréviaire des honnêtes gens*" is the very antipodes of Homer; it is personal *par excellence*.

The list of XVI. Century prose-writers is closed: Rabelais, Calvin, and Montaigne attain unto the first three; Amyot was but a "translateur," though given the palm by Montaigne "sur tous nos écrivains françois."



## IX. The XVII. Century.

**Francois de Malherbe** (1555-1628) is the Pollio who ushers in a new Century; as he worthily closed the XVI., so he opens the XVII. Henri IV., if we are to believe G ruzez, made of the French a nation, and of their jargon Malherbe made a speech. France and Navarre are henceforward France. *Baragouin* is henceforth confined to those Bretons who eat the husks which the swine reject. The autonomy Henri gained and maintained for his kingdom, Malherbe conquered and defended for the republic of letters.

In other words, a new era has dawned. Standing with Malherbe, and looking forward far as human eye can pierce the future, one sees, or seems to see, already a vista crowded with mighty men. And of these are Richelieu and Corneille. In the pulpit are Bossuet and F nelon; philosophy has its Descartes, Malebranche, Pascal; comedy, its Moli re; fable and satire, La Fontaine and Boileau. La Bruy re and La Rochefoucauld are there, and the *Letters* of S vign  make even Vitr  interesting. In a word, the Great Century is all before us, and, in point of time, its coryph us is Malherbe. He it is that men call "the tyrant of words and syllables"; that lost son and daughter and son, but reached all sorrow's crown of sorrows on his own deathbed, when a nurse spoke bad French. He had smitten hip and thigh the Ronsardists, whose Pl iade was to him a byword and a hissing. He had told one, Desportes, a rhymer of no mean calibre and drawing over 120,000 francs for

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doing nothing in three or four abbayes, that he preferred his potage to his verse. Men had feared his supreme disdain, women had adored him and wrought for him the equivalent of worked slippers for *littérateurs* in lordly Aberdeen. He had ruined the fair name for poesy of Ronsard ; he had warped the sense of Seneca (how pestilently present in letters of those days was this pet horror of Macaulay!) ; he had villanously imitated Tansillo and put *S. Peter's tears* in his bottle. And in his death he was insulted by an hireling that massacred his tongue !

There is in Malherbe a touch of Callimachus, to whom no plague was greater than a big book. The "Remains" of François are modest, but generally perfect with the perfection of Alexander Pope. They visibly eschew, as they would the Foul Fiend, Hiatus and clashing vowels and overflowing lines and arbitrary succession of rhymes "male" and "female." His wand gave French verse magical harmony, grace, a noble *sostenuto*, hitherto lacking. His "Psalm cxlv." is esteemed consummate in workmanship. We still admire in him what his contemporaries extolled—novelty. The "majority" of the French genius seems attained in him. In him French speech has the vigour and the virility that are now due to it. He was *chef d'école*. Interpreter of the Muses, he started a reform, in whose vitality he was himself a fervent believer. He taught poetry orally : one had almost said that he retailed it like cheese, in the manner of the *Frogs'* Inferno of Aristophanes. He sorely rated his unhappy pupils. And yet this middle-aged idol was no grand poet, no genius. Régnier opined that "he prosed in



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"rhyme and rhymed in prose," and Régnier was right. The Spirit never "moved" him: the bard would not allow it. He went to work with compass and foot-rule. Meting, he meted the line very cunningly, but he put no fire in it. Fire or passion or enthusiasm disturbs one's equilibrium, and Malherbe's balance was very sure. Trim and tidy and true to the canon is each line—each word, each vowel. Reading his *Stanzas to Duperrier*—and every proper person knows them by heart—one hears the vocal condolence rise as it ought to rise, or fall as is most justly due, at the precise moments consecrated to arsis and to thesis respectively. In short, to him we owe the mould of Corneille and Racine.

Lord Byron has somewhere remarked that, had he known Pope's careful cadence better, he had written finer verse, and perhaps Swinburne was of his opinion. Even an untamed steed of Mazeppa should be trained, should be held with bit and bridle, lest it fall upon us.

Something such as I have tried to limn was Malherbe. **De Guez de Balzac** did Malherbe's work, in prose reform. Under Balzac's touch the language of his country became supple, bright, cleaned of outlandish terms in Greek and Latin and Italian and patois. The French torrent of speech learns perforce to respect its banks. To borrow Macaulay's figure, the garden of prose now becomes geometrically correct: all is square and angular, in absolute obedience to a law of order that knows no exceptions. Conceivably it might not have struck this "Hermit of the Charente" to be so sublime, so perfect, so four-square

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without flaw, had he not been praised once by Malherbe—an event to be marked with the whitest of stones. Condemned, however, as he was to keep himself at that dizzy height of transcendent excellence, Balzac palls—with bated breath be it said—on the average poor sinner perusing his prose. The cadences are too sweet, the regularity too regular. The usual carnal reader is in the parlous frame of mind shown by a prince now existing, whom the writer makes no claim to know. This Heir Apparent had been feasted through four mortal hours with consummate correctness by a living Lord. The scion of Kings could bear no more. When the ladies retired, he slapped a commoner on the back and bespoke him then and there for a dance.

Corneille must have cried “Halt there! and write vulgar French” when he got Balzac’s reply to his “paquet”: “Your *Cinna* heals the sick, makes the “palsied clap their hands, gives speech to the dumb—“‘to one with cold in head’ were too little to say. “And really I had become speechless and voiceless. “Voice and speech recovered thanks to you, it is right “meet that I use them twain to your greater glory “and to crying unendingly ‘oh, passing fair!’”

Had Balzac been Voiture writing to a dame, he could hardly have been more *précieux*. Nisard calls him *vir probus, dicendi peritus*, which is a criticism like another.

Malherbe, then, sowed, and Balzac watered, and Richelieu gave the Académie française The avowed

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intention of this 1635 creation was "d'établir des  
"règles certaines de la langue françoise et de rendre  
"le langage françois non seulement élégant mais  
"capable de traiter tous les arts et toutes les sciences."

## X. The Immortals.

AS shading is necessary above all in a picture, so in a poetical assembly (dashed with prose) obscurities are inevitable. The first Forty Immortals included Châtelet, Porchères, etc. The ruling triumviri were the creating Cardinal, Chapelain and Vaugelas. Of these the second was, by universal consent at the time, worthy of poetic palms . . . had he not tried poetry. "Parler Vaugelas" was the best of *bon ton* about 1672, when the *chic* treated cavalierly terms that were damned unequivocally by *Remarques sur la langue française*. This work shows the hereditary descent and evolution of the Académie from the Hôtel de Rambouillet. French now (1635) can hold its own against Latin, chosen as late as 1604, by de Thou, for his *Universal History*. Even the court—Gascon, like Montaigne, in its parlance—had been purified by Malherbe, and could appreciate the nation's actual linguistic assets. From that naughty court, say some, had sprung the *salon d'Arthénice*, who could not brook barbarisms in language and irregularity in morals. And to this Henri IV., those before and those after him at the helm of State were unduly wedded. From ill, therefore, good had sprung—the *chambre bleue*, following the boudoir of *Arthénice*, and the Académie crowning the work. The literary réunions, also, at the house of **Conrart** (1603-1675) had sprung from meetings at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and these réunions had been mentioned to Richelieu. All, then, had worked together for the purification of the country—Court,

## THE IMMORTALS.

tongue, letters. All which gives certain British huge leverage against ourselves. For we have no Academy, and, consequently, no "rule of the road" in our attempts at writing or pronouncing our language. Now reason would that we should have fixed limits and canons beyond which we could not go and which we should follow. These the French have. Whatever we may think of their verse in general, their prose is usually delightful reading exactly for this reason that the correct word is in the correct place. Their Grammar tells us where to put the accent, on the last syllable: the exceptions are all tabled: a man cannot choose but go straight—he is so "personally conducted." French schools have their various courts for their various classes, with a *pion* for each yard. The dear children can hardly breathe without being observed by a *surveillant*, whether in play time or in the street. On leaving *la boîte*, the army soon claims them, and there they are again subjected to the official glare. The Academy, a Government institution, keeps writers in swaddling clothes in like manner. Now the great sin is this: not to have the fear of the Academy before one's eyes. God and the Prophets are as dust in the balance, the Academy is all in all. The most pornographic authors must be very careful as to the gender of *foudre*. They must make no confusion over the suitable—and *only* suitable—mood and tense in a temporary clause. Of late years, it is true, certain tolerance is extended touching the Past Participle and cognate horrors, but the man who avails himself of such tolerance runs a risk in some circles of being *mal vu*. True,

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Voltaire (for instance) ignored or was ignorant of such and such a rule and has even broken it. His crime be on his own head! It has perished with him, and must never be renewed. Possibly it may be explained as *metri causa*, or as making no difference to the reading of the line! But never more be such felony seen: it must never be imitated. Such, roughly, seems the standpoint of the Academicians and of the majority of Gauls, who all dread to offend. These same "Immortals" have from their very creation decided on composing not only a Grammar but also *Rhétorique*, *Poétique* and a Dictionary. About the last-named, at least, they are still deciding with a slowness and deliberation worthy of a better cause. Such nonchalant sauntering through "groves of Academe" is meet enough in the case of men whose names are to live for ever. But the Accademia della Crusca, the Florentine 1582 equivalent of the Académie, seems to *have* compiled its dictionary and published many excellent editions of older Italian poets.

A curious coincidence is Richelieu's and Charlemagne's having had the same idea of founding learned societies. Later than Charlemagne, there was the *Académie des Jeux floraux* (already referred to) at Toulouse, 1323, for poesy culture only. Suppressed, of course, by the Convention of 1793, the Académie française was restored, under that name, in 1816, by Louis XVIII. Though centralisation *à la française* in the matter of an Academy has never been possible in England or Germany, our Transatlantic cousins have their American Academy of Arts and Sciences, in Boston, since 1870. Franklin originated it in an earlier

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form. Boston, however, is not sufficiently select *per se* for modern up-to-date philology, which has its Cave of Adullam, or *turris eburnea*, in Brookline, the aristocratic suburb of Franklin's birthplace. To these Sybarites of Science, the dwellers in Brookline, and to none beside under Heaven's broad canopy, has pure English been vouchsafed. Indeed, the writer of "Poor Richard" does well to be dead, as, should he arise from the grave to-day, his ignorance of his language, as settled in Brookline drawing rooms, might shock many of his countrymen and townsmen.



## XI. René Descartes.

IN less hurry to be born than even Darwin's elephant, the Académie française, officially constituted by letters patent of Louis XIII. on January 2, 1635, only met for the first time on July 10, 1637. In that same year appeared Descartes' *Discours sur la Méthode*, which was at once translated into Latin, but took twenty-one years to reach a second edition. Had **Descartes** attempted, like Zola, to enter the ranks Immortal—no doubt, he would have been equally unsuccessful. A contemporary grammarian—and of them was the Kingdom of the Académie—Pierre César Richelet, does not even mention Descartes, though René has apparently used the word *poêle* in an unusual sense—but, I piously trust, in the appropriate gender. The *Discours* was thought in Latin, though first written in French, which perhaps suffers in consequence. A "conversation étudiée," it tries not to be dry, and yet claims to be scientific. Surely Edgar Allan Poe would not think himself scientific when he wrote that he "held within his hand grains of the golden sand," when he bitterly asked if "*all* that "we see or seem is but a dream within a dream." And yet this is but Descartes' "Il peut se faire que "je me trompe, et ce n'est peut-être qu'un peu de "cuivre et de verre que je prends pour de l'or et du "diamant." Elsewhere the "scientific" philosopher so far forgets himself as to adapt the figure of the house built upon the sand from the Gospel—*quo quid jejuniis?* In yet a third passage he calls himself a



## RENE DESCARTES.

remover of quicksand in quest of bedrock: this, all this in 1637 must have seemed unscientific and the "Method" of madness. And yet, if we must (indiscreetly) speak the truth, the *Discours de la Méthode*, not running into one hundred pages, is, without intention on the part of its author, literature. O! that mine enemy would write a book! may have been the feeling of this member of a noble family, all *gens d'épée* but his father, fallen so low as to be *conseiller au Parlement* at Rennes, Brittany. René was no hack, no "Grub Street" denizen. But he was gentleman enough to give his book all the treasures of his experience and genius, and that made something literary, however little he may have wished it. His words are well chosen. Clearness reigns supreme. That the Classical—Latin—construction betrays itself is a fault, but a venial one. But Descartes was neither the father nor the grandfather of the XVII. Century literature, as Amos was no prophet, neither was he a prophet's son. Had the philosopher never existed, sense and sweet reasonableness would yet have characterised the literature named. He was the child of his time, not its sire. What his contemporaries applied to politics and letters, he made work in science and philosophy—to wit, common sense. The Papal authority of Aristotle and S. Thomas Aquinas was now melting, whether the crucible of Cartesian genius were therefor employed or no. Such, at least, is the saner view of the two. The other is that Descartes was a *primum mobile*, originating (before his birth) a movement that whirled both him and his fellows;

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that all XVII. Century bookmanship bears date "1637" and the same *imprimatur* as the *Discours*. Somebody has found out that *bon sens* (Descartes' supposed invention) was really known to Corneille in 1628. Perhaps it is even older. In like manner, "Hell is paved, etc.," was attributed to various recent Doctors, Samuel Johnson among the number, until it was found enshrined in *Job*. If we must father something on the Hermit of Holland, let us call him "le père d'une nouvelle école fondée sur le libre examen." Furthermore, let us allow that this father of modern philosophy, in his hunger and thirst after truth universal, burrowed in the pit whence were digged the truths of a French thinker, who multiplied himself as the locust and who called himself Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyere, what you will. Some of these thinkers went further than Descartes in their spiritualism. Some of them are seers who see and prophesy Absolute Truth. And all of them preach, pray or prophesy in excellent French. Cousin calls Descartes' language "a creation worthy of those other "creations" that he lavished on men, a language "naïf "et mâle, sévère et hardi, cherchant avant tout la clarté "et trouvant par surcroît la grandeur."

## XII. Style Cornélien.

A FEW months before the *Discours* came out Corneille's *Cid*. Nowadays it is difficult and laudable to read **Pierre Corneille** le grand without somnolence. Even a modern surgeon and physician, Professor of Anatomy at a French University and a Frenchman born and bred, who would write himself Gaul in any warrant or quittance in France and Navarre, confessed as much to me. Sceptical, I saw *Polyeucte* and believed. And I put down this feeling—first, to my own *ἀναισθησία* and, secondly, to Corneille's ignorance of Greek, and, say, of Sophocles. Richelieu found the author of the *Cid* lacked *l'esprit de suite*. Thus his Rodrigue is ordered by the King to fight a duel, whereas duelling was his previous crime in the eyes of the same King. His *Médée* is inspired by Seneca's, not Euripides'; but it has *purpurei panni*, in spite of Horace, and to the delight of his countrymen, contemporary and other. In his 1633-1634 plays Voltaire finds only *sparks of genius*: one can say of *Polyeucte*, it keeps Boileau's Unities. *Théodore* was hissed, in 1645, and *Pertharite, roi des Lombards*, in 1652. If Æschylus painted men as gods; Sophocles, men as they ought to be, and Euripides men as they are—Corneille characterised mankind, roughly speaking, as did Sophocles. Of women he knew very little. And without the *harem* the average playwright cannot make his pieces take. Even a book of adventure where love is tabooed and women not mentioned,

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as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, requires consummate art to make it popular. His *Psyché* verses (act iii., sc. iii.) are a brilliant exception to his failure in writing up love. As in the case of Sophocles, too, he wrote these delicious lines within some few years of his death, when freshness and vigour and passion are usually spent in a man and poet. Corneille's love is too often that of an ivory statue (objectively or subjectively or both). Aphrodite is chary of vivifying his Galateas for the behoof of his Pygmalions, love's laggards often. Simple and grand as sculpture, his characters are not seldom as immovable. Action flags—seems, indeed, on occasion unable to claim the name of action. Evolution has nothing to do with great Pierre's heroes and heroines; they are as Cicero's fellow-orator, who *idem manebat sed non idem placebat*. Their measure is taken by the reader as soon as they are presented to him. The heroines have been called "adorable furies," but have little Æschylean. We are bidden by certain critics to put down the monotony of Corneille to his environment; to Richelieu's conduct towards the *Cid*, that unique breaking from the then admired Classical gray dullness; to contemporary lust after Seneca. Corneille, we are amiably reminded, was nothing but genius, rightly struggling to be free, to soar and etherialise. To these Mentors there can be but one answer, and that Hudibrastic:

We grant, altho' he had much wit  
He was very slow of using it,  
As being loath to wear it out . . .

## STYLE CORNELIEN.

Not to wear it out, le grand Pierre puts it one day on Polyeucte, another on Rodrigue—e.g., the line

Je le ferais encor, si j'avais à le faire.

Neither damages the cloth much, as both do nothing much beyond talking, and "action" is confined largely to messengers, confidants, ἀγγελοι and ἐξάγγελοι.

The young *Horace* remarks on the absence of such heroes as himself from the World's stage, being as they are *âmes peu communes*. These great men coined in Corneille's mint speak a special language—"vehemence," Bossuet calls it, and mere men name it *cornélien*.

Against this *cornélien* mould, stereotyped, gray, immobile, wherein superior persons speak superiorly in a Homeric strain, no wonder Richelieu rebelled. He put up Scudéry and minor men to attack the *beau Cid*, which he got his scullions to parody. He even abused his authority with his own creation, the *Académie*, summoning it to damn the adaptation of Guillem de Castro. In a quandary, the poor Academicians "hedged." Their *Sentiments sur le Cid* remind us of Luther's comical strictures on Henry VIII. The Académie had to indict in writing, "The "Defender of the Faith" had a wish to publish a book. "Wie solt ein arm Man thun, der gern schreiben "wolt, und künd nichts? Er muss ie so firlefantzen, "und mit Worten umbherschweissen das die Leut "dencken er wölle ein Buch schreiben." Some have affected to see in Richelieu's otherwise mean conduct towards the *Cid* political discretion. He wished, according to this theory, to prevent Spaniards, then

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at war with France, and duelling, another pet aversion, from being extolled on the stage. In other words, the cardinal was only doing something like the converse of our play licenser, who lately stopped for a season the performance of the *Mikado*, because forsooth we and the Japanese are friends!



### XIII. Racine.

WE have seen that Corneille did not know Greek ; **Racine** (1639-1699) could read Sophocles at 16. Besides, his *début* was well timed. In 1664, he also was *cornélien*, but began to be himself in the *Andromaque* of 1667. He certainly surpassed Corneille with *Bérénice*, and transcended Euripides with his *Iphigénie*, if we are to trust Boileau—which it is not absolutely necessary to do, as Boileau and Racine were personal friends and as Euripides is no mean bard. But Racine Christianised sad Electra's poet in his *Phèdre*, and that artistically is for a pagan writer worse than defeat. Poor Phædra is henceforth to figure aureoled with uncovenanted mercy. So can one imagine—say, in the Louvre or Vatican—a statue of Priapus with head of St. Peter ! Incongruity could no further go. Now "conversion" is an excellent thing. Huysmans died "converted," Paul Bourget is living a "converted" life. But æsthetically none of these good men, alive and dead, had or have the right to foist their views at too acute an angle on their readers. *Phædra* is perfidious and incestuous. This is evil or this is good. At any rate, mythology, tradition, the whole literary environment of her name and fame hold her perfidious and incestuous. We have not the right to Christianise her—if for no other cause, for the sufficient reason that she lived, or is imagined to have lived, before Christ. Taine has argued similarly regarding Dickens. In that humorist the scamps either become converted or die the death. There is no (Newman's) *via media*.

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Such an iron alternative is as unæsthetic and inartistic as to kill off "Little Nell" for the gross commercial reason that American pirates had made her "live happily ever after." The pirates deserved no consideration from Dickens, but the public does from us. So Racine's break with tradition, because he thought the traditional subject he was treating immoral, admits of no excuse, artistically speaking. (Erasmus' "Sanctè Socrates, ora pro nobis" is not more absurd: this last, however, is probably intentionally comic.) Racine's choice of *Esther* and his treatment according to the Bible story of her character are absolutely just, religiously and artistically. He finds her a Jewess and he leaves her a Jewess. Why, then, could he not let Iphigenia and Phædra live and die in sorrow and sin, in paganism and peace? Madame de Sévigné writes (Feb. 21, 1689) of *Esther's* innocence, sublimity and simplicity; Boileau calls the *Athalie* Racine's fairest work—but the public caballed and damned it. Seventeen years after the author's death, some of the same public clapped it. *Extinctus amabitur idem.*

Even during the life of the younger, the two dramatists had been compared and contrasted. In 1686; Longepierre admired the *statuesque* Corneille and the *picturesque* Racine. La Bruyère judges the former more "moral" and Racine more "natural," as—respectively—Sophocles and Euripides. Bossuet extols the force and vehemence of Corneille and Racine's greater "justesse" and regularity (*Lettre au Cardinal du Bouillon.*) We may go further and deeper. Low down in the characters of each



## RACINE.

dramatist is an inherent difference of point of view. The spring of tragic action (or rather inaction) in Corneille is the grandiose; whence winged words from heroes placed in strangest, most unnatural situations. He "falsified" history in *Héraclius* (1647) and remarked that "le sujet d'une belle tragédie doit n'être pas vraisemblable." Racine, on the other hand, preached and practised on the principle that "il n'y a que le vraisemblable qui touche dans la tragédie." Corneille's sublime souls are "Titans unconquered still," innocent of repentance or remorse—ephemeral affections! Racine's poor storm-tossed, passion-ravaged Nero, Athalia, Andromache are very human, shaken with every veering wind of thought, a prey to agitation and uncertainty: there is no peace to the wicked. Racine's *action* exists. But it is intermittent. It depends on the swaying soul-seizures of the chief characters. In these any new idea sends him off on a new quest. Action, too, which is cribbed and confined by the "Three Unities," as—except *Esther*—all Racine's is, may be that of man's mind—tumult raging while outward calm holds the man. And his description of the agitated Ego and burning brain of such and such a hero (and a villain is a hero, for the nonce) goes straight to the heart of the Frenchman. To that of a non-Frenchman it often goes with diminished current.

Excepting the inevitable Seneca, Corneille seems to have owed little to predecessors; Racine owed much to Corneille. And it is unfair to sit in judgment on the two, as if they were comparable. The pair does not

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start from scratch: an appreciable handicap is inevitable. Corneille has left too many plays and Racine too few, for comparison to be just. Besides, the latter knew Greek and could help himself with both hands when and if he wished. Corneille had not this advantage. He was also *sui generis*, a fact which alone puts him out of court for any comparison.

Jean Racine was buried, by his own desire, in Port-Royal; on the destruction of which he was exhumed, in 1710, and lies in the Church of St. Étienne du Mont, with Pascal, now to be considered briefly.

## XIV. Blaise Pascal.

THE work of **Pascal** (1623-1662) consists chiefly of the *Lettres au provincial* (*les Petites lettres de Louis de Montalte*) and the *Pensées*. Now it was only in 1842, 180 years after their author's death, that Victor Cousin consulted the MS. kept in St. Germain des Près library, and discovered that Port-Royal had in 1670 mutilated the original of the *Pensées* and, like Mezentius, joined their dead (prose) to the living (writing of Pascal). The only excuse for Port-Royal seems to be that, by their trick, they made possible the appearance of what was less or more Pascal in the reign of Louis XIV., and that by depositing the MS. in St. Germain they had, also, made possible the detection of their own deceit. Since the day when Aristotle's work was recovered, as we are told, from the Skepsis cellar, few stranger literary histories have been handed down. If his great friends, they of Port-Royal, could so act with his "Remains," reason would that Pascal himself might have peculiar views of morality; such as is concerned with property in writing, priority in discovery and kindred themes. We know, at least, that quite lately his countrymen have been combating his claim to fair fame under these heads. But then the French dearly love "showing up" foes and friends, others and themselves. Thus, the more Mr. Andrew Lang writes up, the more Anatole France writes down, Jehanne d'Arc (Darc). Voltaire's version had long been half-forgotten when up rose Thalamas. In the France of to-day, however,

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where Free Thought has reared himself a throne, the Man in the Street reckes nought of theological polemics. Pascal's Paris thought apparently of little else. His Century had witnessed previous dogmatic skirmishes against M. M. les R.R. P.P. Cotton, Garasse and Le Moyne. Pascal's *Provinciales* fight, opening with theologic long range firing defensive, brusquely became offence. The objective changed too : now it is Grace, now Casuistry, now those Casuists of all others, the Society of Jesus. Theology proper shades off all but imperceptibly into *Morale*. Some say that Pascal lied right cunningly in this quarrel, others aver he made mistakes ; all are at one on his cleverness. He aided or he marred the cause of religion. But the vehicle of help rendered or of ruin wrought was excellent fooling of the foe. One of the foe is even credited with praising indirectly Pascal's workmanship. "Had you not written what you have, of what would you wish to be author?" a bishop is said to have queried of Bossuet. And Bossuet (in the tradition) answered : "The *Provinciales*." But there was Modernism in those days, as in ours. A Jesuit seems to have invited Pascal to join in assailing the walls of this Jericho. For his last four years of life, then, the Truce of God obtained. Saul, whose name was Blaise, breathed no more slaughter, but anonymously (observe this touch) helped the *curés* of Paris and its neighbourhood in the course of the year 1658. If, as Buffon will have it, the style is the man, then Blaise Pascal was many men in one, for his manner of inditing is various. He seems under the empire, to use a Gallicism, of sensibility, wit (in the reign of Queen Anne sense) and

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"chaffing" gaiety. He is, or appears to be, at various times possessed of the spirit of Descartes, Bossuet, La Bruyère, Fénelon, Voltaire.

Without Pascal there would not be much heed taken by the rapid reader of Port-Royal. And yet Port-Royal and the *Académie* were schoolmasters of the XVII. Century. From 1660 the teaching of the one and the linguistic studies published by the other had worked wonders. From 1660 the clever writer must be true, substantial, natural; Reason must have the upper hand; the glory has departed henceforward from mere *bel esprit*. The Τρίτος ἄνθρωπος in the Century's influence over letters was Louis XIV. in proper person. The King's share in shaping the destiny of literature in his time was, perhaps, more negative than positive. He lived and let live. If the matter published, read in the *salons*, handed from one courtier to another did not affect him, Louis allowed it currency. For an absolute monarch this was much, and in this sense he was *complaisant* enough.

## XV. Poquelin, dit Molière.

IN my lightning sketch of the French stage during the careers of Pierre Corneille and Racine I have purposely omitted touching on their comedy, as Molière was so soon due. J. B. Poquelin, which is Molière (1622-1673), was a spoiled child of the Grand Monarque. His *toupet* was encouraged, his *hardiesses* were applauded. Indeed, the stage, tragic and comic, seems to have been granted a freedom otherwise unknown at the time. Comedy kings were Louis' royal buffoons; tragedians, his chaplains. Jean Baptiste was to him what Archie the fool was to Bluff Hal (VIII.). The "folly of preaching" on the comic stage made many a courtier "laugh yellow," in right sardonic sort, against himself, in his own despite. Hypocrisy was now grappled with, and scotched, by a poet whose Protean personality, itself impalpable, seemed present everywhere. Like Aristophanes, he corrected abuses; unlike him, he had no Parabasis. Molière was impersonal, though acting ever in the title-rôle. He was born exactly at the right time, when the young King was all for pleasure, when Parisian society was of the utmost refinement, when he was, like Rev. Booker Washington, actually invited to dine with the Chief of the State. The *Précieuses ridicules* then, as now, were scandalised. *Préciosité* is not so dead, even after the ingenious satire played in 1658. But Molière was worth many dinners. He paid back his hosts with an endless feast of laughter, a Banquet of Trimalchio, where the courses continue indefinitely amid



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ostentation and flattery and grandeur and coarseness—exhibited by Petronius, satirised by the great comedian. The successful man is often he who is unsuccessful at the start. Like the wren which builds several sham nests before it decides on furnishing one for the eggs and brood, the prosperous character has often varied his life-essays. So Molière. On returning from his long tour in the provinces, in 1658, what he played before the King was the tragedy of *Nicomède*, not a comedy. Indeed, it has been observed that “la comédie de Molière côtoyait perpétuellement le “drame.” Most of his great comedies leave on the spectator, or reader, a feeling of sadness. Thus the *Tartufe* should finish artistically by the ruin of Orgon and family at the end of the fourth act. The fifth is a Satyric Drama, grafted on to the tragedy of the first four Acts. To call the whole a comedy is almost to play with words. But professionally Molière was a comedian—actor and author, and was destined to die in harness, representing a malingerer when he was all but *in extremis*. Pagliacci must laugh because he is Pagliacci—aye, even when his soul is rent and he gives perforce his darling to the dogs. His range was very great, from romantic to heroic comedy, from *farce gauloise* dating from the Middle Ages to character-painting proper. He followed Nature regularly, and Aristotle's rules, when at his best works, *cedro linenda*. Aristotle, he says in the *Critique de l'École des Femmes* (sc. vii.), spells *bon sens*. He was always “taking stock” of things; his friends rallied him on this, saying he could not go into a barber's shop without taking in at a glance

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every article. This Sherlock Holmes habit of mind was the making of him. Great range often implies superficiality. But his depth is immense in forming types—his Harpagon, his Tartufe, each obviously nobody's portrait, but each a unique avatar of Avarice and Hypocrisy. As he loved truth to Nature and as *sunt lacrimæ rerum*, Molière was bound to be sad. As he was a comic author and comic actor, he had to raise a laugh. Hence he was professionally a Democritus, at heart a Heraclitus. He "saved his face" in his comedies by poor makeshifts. Fun is made, almost unseasonably often, by Dorine, Martine or Nicole. Sganarelle and maître Jacques crack jests. M. Dimanche or the *maître de philosophie* is told off to be absurd. This is a weak side in the author. The fact that one has laughed, almost through one's tears, a laugh extorted, so to say, does not prevent the general impression from being sad. And that is not really all, or even mostly, comic, which leaves one brooding when home again after the theatre. Not that Molière makes us good. It was neither his intention nor his duty to do so. I take it that didactic poetry is a sin against Art. Our comic poet did not commit this sin. Thus he attacked the *Précieuses* and the *Pédantes*, but did not convert them. Nothing was further, probably, from his intention. No Blue-stocking became an ideal wife and mother after hearing or reading him. So, we may imagine, no husband ever found his tea more ready for him, on his return from work, since Dickens painted the literary portrait of a wife clothing the Africans to the detriment of her London *ménage*. An



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actor-author who was his own *impresario* could not have had much time on his hands, especially one who died between the shafts. So we find in Molière traces of hasty work, redundancy, "padding," carelessness, obscurity—even in the *Femmes savantes* and *Misanthrope*. Poetic comedies are with him the great offenders in this respect. Those in prose are better. The best are, perhaps: *Don Juan*, *le Médecin malgré lui*, *l'Avare*, *le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, *les Fourberies de Scapin*, *le Malade imaginaire*.

Those *précieux*, La Bruyère and Fénelon, have taxed him, the one with *jargon and barbarism*, the other with "worse verse than prose." So Horace, who could not (probably) have written a play for his life, finds that his earlier countrymen were over-indulgent for the wit of Plautus. Your honest critic who is above-board in all his dealings should himself essay the *genre* in which he picks holes: succeeding in that, he may hope for a hearing at the bar of posterity. So with Molière's judges. A comic poet evidently cannot make his divers and diverse characters all speak in the same style. Philaminte, Henriette, Chrysale, and Martine are not cast in the same mould, neither can each fashion to pronounce her French as sweetly upon her tongue as La Bruyère possibly pronounced his. Others have admired Molière for forming a harmonious whole out of different dialects and for observing the *art des nuances*. Boileau told Louis XIV. that Molière was the greatest writer of his reign. "Molière c'est mon homme" cried La Fontaine, whose verdict was not necessarily influenced by his friendship.

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After Molière's death (1673) the Grand Monarque passes through two stages. During the first twelve years, up to 1685, he encouraged authors and actors, collects the *dissecta membra* of Molière's troupe, creates the *Comédie française*. Thereafter he was Mme. de Maintenon's husband, more *réglé* and less of a first-nighter. The adapter (not to say author) of *Don Juan* did well to die before 1686, when—apparently—the Oratorian preacher before the King attacked *Spectacles*, to the horror of the courtiers and the building up of Louis. An imitator of Molière, Dancourt or Carton, gave up the stage in despair at the new-born piety. Like the famous Dr. Kenealy, he wrote Psalms in verse,—but providentially omitted to publish them. Voltaire has somewhere unearthed the *Grondeur* of Brueys and Palaprat, "Supérieur à toutes les farces de Molière." **Regnard** (1655—1709) also pleased Voltaire: "qui ne se plaît pas avec "Regnard n'est pas digne d'admirer Molière." He lives chiefly by his prodigious lies regarding his imprisonment by Musulmans—that ready subject for exaggeration! He has also a character, Angélique, "sotte à vingt-trois carats." Indeed, so low had French comedy now fallen that Boileau thought the King had better have driven out the French than the Italians in 1697.

## XVI.

### Boileau Despréaux, La Fontaine.

I PASS on to the author of *l'Art poétique*. Of this **Boileau** is less the author than the spokesman. For it is what M. Nisard calls it, "la déclaration de foi littéraire d'un grand siècle." Its doctrines, as there put forth, Horace apart, had been threshed out and discussed by Molière, Racine, La Fontaine and Boileau himself. Each member of the "Symposium" had given his author's view of his own *genre* and his critic's view of the *genres* of his friends. *L'Art poétique* is the code of good taste. Boileau never dreamed of having any other readers than the public, the Man in the Street. So he is not methodical, not complete; speaks neither of Corneille nor of Racine, neither of Plautus nor of Euripides. La Fontaine does not figure by name. Unlike Pope, the French Horace was not trucelessly at war with dunces. Cotin, enough drubbed by Molière, and poor Chapelain are passed over in silence. Indeed, it is probably owing to this his "undangered meed," as Pindar calls the quality, that the King put him into the Academy. His silence on paper was sweetness long drawn out. In over a (literary) half-century he was guilty of some 7,000 verses only, divided over the *Satires*, the *Epistles*, the *Art poétique*, the *Lutrin*, the *Ode on the taking of Namur* (1692), and a few fleeting pieces. In prose, he translated Longinus' *on the Sublime* and

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wrote his *Réflexions sur Longin*, with a *Dialogue sur les héros de roman*. And that is nearly all.

One of the characteristics of his countrymen in describing this good man's good verse is their own perfect silence on his model. Not a syllable hardly is breathed of Horace. No comparison or contrast between the *lamp Venusine* and Despréaux is hinted at. A native reader would imagine that Boileau did the whole thing off his own bat. Similarly for a "crib" from Martial, the epigram on Paulus' verses being his own because he had bought them, we read (in Dr. Deltour's *Littérature française*, p. 84): "On connaît cette épigramme de Boileau :

On dit que l'abbé Roquette  
Prêche les sermons d'autrui ;  
Moi, qui sais qu'il les achète,  
Je soutiens qu'ils sont à lui.

"Le poète romain Martial avait dit *avec moins de finesse*: 'Paulus achète des vers, etc.'" To believe the French Docteur-ès-lettres, Boileau epigrammatised, Martial bungled. Horace, no doubt, has to thank Despréaux for imitating and adapting him and *so much improving him*. French finesse, after all, does so add to a robbed Roman author, especially when that Roman author is ignored. Pope was more open as regards his debt to Flaccus, and Pope was not famous for *franchise*.

Joubert says: "Boileau est un grand poète dans la "demi-poésie," and his popularity was immense. I come to another—perhaps the most popular poet, or "demi-poet," of France. My personal experience is

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that I can never be in any Frenchman's company for an hour without having verses of **La Fontaine** buzzing about my ears. In vain have I pointed out that all these fables are infinitely better in the original Greek of Babrius, and as good in *Phædrus*. I am treated as a scoffer and "profane." *Æsop* is not known in the pleasant land of France. He perhaps existed, tolerance will half admit. He, or "another of the same name," conceivably handed down the *Fables*. But for *Fables* there is nobody, there was nobody, there never will be anybody (in French eyes) but La Fontaine. Who thinks the opposite "makes strait the borders of the land of his birth." Trembling we listen to the panegyrist of Molière and of *the* Fabulist: "Le parallèle," cries M. Gérusez, "entre le génie de ces deux grands poètes est donc inevitable. Rome et la Grèce nous opposent des poètes qui soutiennent la comparaison avec Corneille, Racine et Boileau, mais elles n'ont rien à placer légitimement en regard de Molière et de La Fontaine. Si ceux qui les déprécient savent ce qu'ils font, ils sont bien coupables; et bien aveugles, s'ils l'ignorent: ils amoindrissent la France." The reason of this extraordinary (to us Islanders) partiality for their fabulist is perhaps given by M. Nisard: "La Fontaine is the milk of our first years, the bread of the ripe man, the old man's last substantial food. We have babbled his fables when mere infants. Fathers, we have been astonished, when quoting them to our children, to find in them serious pleasure for our age of maturity, after we have been so keenly



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"interested in them as children." He calls La Fontaine the familiar genius of each home. Again, the *contes* are not bad in point of morality, we learn, because La Fontaine's view was different from that of his critics. "Je dis hardiment," are the words of La Fontaine in self-defence, "que la nature du *conte* le voulait ainsi"; in fact, Horace's precept was with the impugned *raconteur*. Priests and sad folk tried to make him see the falsity of his reasoning, but he contended that the gayer the *conte*, the less impression it makes; the sweeter the melancholy of chaste tales, the more dangerous they are. I shall not dare to canvass the great fabulist's reasoning: it is too great for me. I only seem to remember the case of Boccaccio, who died at Certaldo in 1375 after long retirement, repeated wishes to enter Orders and deep contrition for having published certain recast *fabliaux* not absolutely unlike the *contes*. Of course, too, we know that Voltaire, in his 1769 *Correspondance*, called the *contes* "autant au-dessous de l'Arioste que l'écolier est au-dessous du maître." But Arouet must needs have his fun. Like the Arabs, who have 200 words for "camel" and 100 for "lion" (or *vice versa*), La Fontaine gives the "fox" and "king of beasts" a different epithet pretty much every time he mentions them. The French are much struck with this. The German Lessing, *ut captus est Germanorum*, has tried to improve on La Fontaine, as another Teuton essayed to do on Shakespeare. The Saxon poisons the cheese in the parable of the Fox and the Crow! Another instance to show that painting the lily is the Teutons' speciality, which they cannot renounce

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even in the apologues of him whom Furetière calls "inimitable." As La Fontaine praised Molière, so Molière said of La Fontaine: "Nos beaux esprits ont beau se trémousser, ils n'effaceront pas le bon-homme." Joubert finds in him a "plénitude de poésie." His rhyming is extolled. He seems to have handled the "free" verse, imported from Italy about 1625, in a masterly manner, ringing the changes on alexandrines, seven, eight and ten foot lines with perfect ease and grace.

## XVII.

### Bossuet and a French Fr. Bernard Vaughan, S.J.

*Paullo majora canamus.*

**Bossuet** (1627-1704) is practically contemporary with La Fontaine (1621-1695). But the difference between them in general is immense, even in style. Bossuet is one who, in Fénelon's phrase, only uses words to express thought, and thought only for virtue and truth. Severe in the vehicle of reasoning, as in reasoning itself, he was convincing by dint of pushing home an irresistible logic. Himself instinct with the truths he preached, he "emptied himself" readily in page-long periods. His, as he says, were "the lightnings that pulverise, the thunders that terrify, the bolt that smites the heart." A poet in imagination, he could fathom the meaning of the Major Prophets, while the simplest truths to *religieuses* were clothed by him in finest raiment. We are not obliged to take the Gallic estimate of them, to compare them to Demosthenes' best efforts, to award them the palm over Cicero. Such be the ravings of perfervid patriotism. But Bossuet is fine, in the heavy old-fashioned style, once so much praised, now so little read. Panegyric is so much easier than perusal. And Bossuet's panegyrists prove too much. They are not, as a rule, content to do what he himself confesses to having done, metaphorically skated warily over thin



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ice, when necessary. They praise *en bloc*. There is about this a divine simplicity that we do not find in most of Bossuet, who employs tropes and figures to embalm that great man, dead, whose good works, living, were rare. He mentions the false colours of rhetoric, the devious ways of official flattery indispensable to glossing over, or passing in sonorous silence, licence and ambition, self-interest and injustice. Purple iniquity and crowned crime incarnate must die. Dead, they must be praised for such evil as they did not or could not do. And that needs delicate delivery in the preacher. Fear of the court might, Bossuet hints, suggest a sermon so profane as to nullify the altar sacrifice. How trim one's sails close to the wind? How find for official recommendation virtues, Christian virtues, in a great man of the earth earthy? Bossuet's cleverness is equal to any pious emergency. Mourning the English Queen, 1669, he advocates Protestant and Catholic re-union; lamenting the Duchess of Orléans, he chants a *memento mori* (1670); Marie-Thérèse "the Spotless" (1683) he holds up as an example to the King, less immaculate; the former Magdalen career of de la Vallière, now Sister Louise de la Miséricorde, he paints in lurid colours, if haply he may save alive the soul of Condé (1685). This continual position between the Devil of courtly "whitewashing" and the Deep Sea of blasphemous complaisance (and compounding scarlet sin) wearied the "citizen prelate." Academic pomp and vanity and lies avoided and rhetoric employed—they weighed on him heavily, and he took his leave. He loved his own *Discours sur l'Histoire universelle* (published in

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1681). Of this the *Suite de la Religion* owes much to Pascal's *Pensées*: in the *Empires* he anticipates part of Montesquieu.

After Elias, Elisha; after Bossuet, **Bourdaloue**. Mme. de Sévigné, who was very chaste herself, describes this Jesuit as "frappant comme un "sourd, disant des vérités à bride abattue, "parlant à tort et à travers contre l'adultère." In fact, Bourdaloue was the Fr. Bernard Vaughan of the day and preached to and against the "Smart Set." Mme. de Sévigné describes how that Set went "en "Bourdaloue," where the crush was awful, especially when the priest began piquantly "dépeindre les gens." The Lady of Vitré confesses she heard him breathlessly, hanging on his words, powerless to respire "until he was pleased to stop." Condé applied to Bourdaloue Gambetta's famous phrase *voilà l'ennemi!* which the French-Italian must have plagiarised and applied—not to the individual, but to the *genus*, Cleric. As usual, nobody in France dreams that Gambetta was not original. Great is the company of XVII. Century preachers, and I propose to close with two only, Massillon and Fénelon.

## XVIII.

### Massillon and Fénelon.

Jean Baptiste Massillon (1663-1742) was, for the times, an extraordinary bishop: he visited his parishes (in the Clermont-Ferrand diocese). Voltaire judged him in his *genre* as perfect as Racine's *Athalie*. A very strict Christian would not please the author of *Zaïre*: consequently, we find that his extolled "*Entretiens*" of Massillon are almost Deist enough to be delivered in a synagogue or mosque. The bishop slurs over every-day truths, to fight passion and vice more resolutely. He is methodical without rigidity. His art conceals art in the admired way of the Ancients.

"Ruined by a woman" is the epitaph of **François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon** (1651-1715). Mme. Guyon was mystically married to the Infant Jesus when her *quietist* doctrines disturbed Fénelon's balance. For this she was imprisoned, while her dupe was made Archbishop of Cambrai and, *after* consecration by Bossuet, took her side openly. A veritable *Tract* controversy begins between consecrator and consecrated. While the Pope is condemning and Louis relegating Fénelon, his *Télémaque* (that infested our youth) is robbed and published. This work is, with the *Fables* of La Fontaine, the most popular in the France of the Great Century. Calypso, Eucharis and Antiope disport themselves in the

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*Télémaque's* rhythmic prose, and dispense the author from doing what he could not—write poetry. Fénelon himself discounts Voltaire's commendation when he says: "C'est une narration faite à la hâte . . . "il y aurait beaucoup à corriger." There was, at any rate, much to deny, e.g., that Kings Idoménée, Sésostris, Adraste, and Pygmalion had any connexion with Louis XIV.; that Mentor was Fénelon; and that *Télémaque* was the duc de Bourgogne. More innocent, if unpractical, is his *Lettre à l'Académie* (1714), addressed to Dacier, *secrétaire perpétuel*.

His quarrel with Bossuet reminds one a little of the famous dispute between Cardinal Newman and Charles Kingsley. But the French prelates' fight was worse, at it gave the Voltairians a welcome handle against the theologians and an occasion to extol Fénelon unduly. Strong reaction set in during the XIX. Century, and against that again the candid critic must guard. M. Villemain has hymned the harmony of the whole in the *Télémaque*, the grandeur of the general idea and the dexterous blending of the episodes. It certainly is not suited for early stages of learning French, however consecrated by long usage in our schools. It should be read for *profit* much later in life, and for *Quietism* without concerning oneself as to the identity of such and such a Greek name with *un quidam*. His prose is not nervous but flowery, lit up with flashes of eloquence. His *Fables*, *Dialogues of the Dead*, *Girls' Education*, *Existence of God*, *Ministry of Pastors*, and *Maxims of the Saints* practically complete the list of his works.

## XIX.

### The Theophrastus of France and "le bon duc."

**La Bruyère** (1645-1696) wrote his *Dialogues sur le Quiétisme* at Bossuet's request, and before that prelate's fight on the question with Fénelon. La Bruyère, like his friend Boileau, was simple and disinterested in his own character. For his *Caractères* he had in his manner of life, as one of the Condé household, every facility of observing Court, town, rich, deserving, *esprits forts*. These and others appear in *Les Caractères de Théophraste traduits du grec, avec les Caractères ou les Mœurs de ce Siècle* (1688). The book, which gave him fame and a swarm of enemies, appeared in the Century as one born out of due time. The order is most admired disorder, and his own countrymen, on occasion, confess that to read a whole chapter at a sitting is hard. The same might be, and even has been, said of perusing similarly a Book of the *Paradise Lost*. The Beautiful is hard! Besides, evil men *are* the majority, and they are satirised by La Bruyère. It is not any one or more *individuals* that are lashed under each chapter-heading. La Bruyère, like Molière, has made patchwork, choosing his rags and patches, as he listed, to make one whole. This whole is only ideally bad, for in this life we cannot find it in the fulness of its badness. La Bruyère's

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evil "character" is held up to its own execration; but before it can execrate or love itself, it must at least exist. And that is what it does not do. This absence of one-ness and simplicity in the "characters" is noticeable even in the style of the book. It is not simple. The *labor limæ* is too apparent and has been too destructive—even to the extent of dilution in the sense. He lacks the ease and graceful manner of the writer *comme il faut*. He is always striving after effect. He has not the *grande manière*. Unlike his predecessors, pioneers in his *genre*, he cannot or will not be natural. He grinds out witty sentences, and the voice of his grinding is not low enough. (This remark is made with extreme respect to the witness, M. l'Abbé d'Olivet, who had known La Bruyère personally and describes him as "craignant toute sorte d'ambition, même celle de montrer de l'esprit.") The French remind us that "La Bruyère envied neither "opulence nor high dignities"—"on condition of "ridiculing these goods of the gods," they might have added. More difficult would it appear *à priori* to rant daily against the *bourgeois*, be a leader of Socialists and live in a fine château all the time—especially with the brain and body of one and the same Député. La Bruyère is known as *fin*. *Finesse*, on which the French so pique themselves, is generally a rapid exposure of but one side of thought, the remainder being left to the reader's intelligence. Hence *finesse* branches off into antithesis and allusion. A work naturally becomes impossible for continuous reading, when it teems with such figures, as does much of La Bruyère and of La Rochefoucauld.



## THE THEOPHRASTUS OF FRANCE.

**La Rochefoucauld**—long called prince de Marsillac—(1613-1680) is “le bon duc” of Mme. de Sévigné and was the friend of such *gens de lettres* as Bossuet and La Fontaine, Mesdames de Sablé and de la Fayette. Commerce with such literary folk was chiefly the occasion of his publishing the *Mémoires* (1662) and the (anonymous) *Maximes* (1665). No book, says Voltaire, did more to form the taste of the nation. Few books also, perhaps, have encountered such distaste, or dislike. Some, however, think that it depends on the mood in which one reads the *Sentences et Maximes morales* whether the reader dubs them a gross libel or judges them a masterly exposure of man’s baseness and inconsequence. Incisive, brief, clear, finished, epigrammatic, melancholy, subtle, built up on personal experience, couched in independent critical terms—such, to imitate his own brevity, is the Duke’s book. *Cherchez la femme* for his several failures in life, Mme. de Chevreuse, Mme. de Longueville, Mme. de Sablé, Mme. de la Fayette. (He had also, *entre parenthèses*, a wife of his own, Andrée de Vivonne, married by him at the age of 15.) His comparative shipwreck of existence evidently embittered him and, as evidently, is responsible for much of his “morale,” over which he raised (in 1675) the superscription: “Nos vertus ne sont le plus souvent que des vices “déguisés.” Crossed continually in his ambition, knowing no world but that of the Court, La Rochefoucauld describes courtiers bitterly. The explanation is “pas plus difficile que cela.” As for his self-love, we know, from all we have read in and written on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, that Φιλαυτία is the spring at

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once of all that is noblest and of all that is lowest in Man. From self-love, one gives his life for his friend, as the glory of doing so is the highest ambition of the self-lover (in the proper sense). Egoistic, too, in Bossuet's eyes, was the self-devotion of nursing the sick. For that divine, hospitals were "la banque du ciel, un moyen d'assurer et de multiplier ses biens par une céleste usure." But La Rochefoucauld's *égoïsme*—which, for him, initiates every action—is inconsistent with any virtue. The Duke is too absolute in his judgments, and would fain make us universalise his views, which do apply with a rough truth to the epoch of the Fronde. From some of them one would readily be misled to criticise the author's own character severely, had we not his life to correct us. He gave the Court a good example as a "straight" man and was a trusty friend. Most honourable, too, and as irreproachably moral as charming in society were Mme. de la Fayette, authoress of *Zaïde* and the *Princesse de Clèves*, and Mme. de Sévigné.



## XX. Madame de Sévigné and Scarron's Widow.

MME. DE LA FAYETTE says of *Mme. de Sévigné* that her "esprit éblouissait les yeux." As the Comte de Bussy-Rabotin has said: "*L'agréable, le badin et le sérieux y sont admirables*" (in the Letters of *Mme. de Sévigné*). He justly, also, praises her naturalness, her ease, her occasional bold negligence; he finds nothing "dead," nothing forced, in her style. Suard finds her delightful, "raisonneuse ou frivole, plaisante ou sublime." He quotes proof of her "grâce," "souplesse d'esprit." Whether she describes *Mme. de Brissac* lying ill of a colic, "belle et coiffée à coiffer tout le monde," or de Louvois' sudden death (description *à la Bossuet*), or Cardinal de Retz and his astounding insouciance of life's duties, or her reading of Plutarch (by quoting), or Louis XIV. speaking to her of Racine's genius—*Mme. de Sévigné* holds the "perpetual secretary" enraptured. He taxes her with vanity, however, and with being momentarily "caillette." But his instance is of the historic and "heroic" occasion when the Monarch of the Century (and of all Time!) danced a minuet with the Lady of Vitré. And what is M. Suard that he should smile in print? He is gallant, however, like every Frenchman, in allowing that a cultivated woman writes letters better than the best mere men who write. He is at one with Montaigne in finding the female *esprit* to be more *prime-sautier*. Sedentary,

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ladies observe better and attend more to *le monde*. They describe events with more ease in expression, more delicately, more on the spur of the moment and with the ideas *felt* at the moment, with more suppleness and variety, with happy turns, with piquant collocations of words, with an inspiration of their own and a felicitous negligence lovelier far than exactness. Again, there is a difference in letter-writing between the glory of woman and of woman. Against the grace, variety and vivacity of Mme. de Sévigné put but the serious and uniform tone of Mme. de Maintenon! That Goth, Voltaire, says of the former lady "C'est dommage qu'elle manque absolument de goût!" Happily Voltaire does not count in such criticisms: here he has confused a "défaut de goût," such as Marie de Rabutin-Chantal's depreciation of Racine (and of coffee), with "une faute de goût." The delectable Marie had every right, if she had the wish, to prefer Fléchier to Mascaron and Corneille to Racine; even her favourite beverage to coffee. Her affection for Mme. de Grignan was, no doubt, excessive, and the daughter's not enough, perhaps, for her mother. Though the "Rochers" is a short (and very agreeable) walk from the mediæval-looking Vitré (Victor Hugo mentions it) and Vitré a very few minutes by train from Rennes, that "capital" is hardly ever mentioned in the Letters. (Vide "Aux Rochers, 21 Juin, 1671.") Even at Vitré *Tartufe* was "point trop mal joué;" *Andromaque* received the meed of six Sévigné tears; *c'est assez pour une troupe de campagne*, where it rained every day for a month in spring, and where "the good families are nothing," but where Lucian

## MADAME DE SEVIGNE.

made good reading. When we remember that this life in Brittany was for economy, so that the mother could send Mme. de Grignan sums that she wasted, we sympathise with the mother and blame the daughter, as does Saint-Simon. Besides being useful to correct the history of her times, Mme. de Sévigné had sympathy, e.g., with Nature, which sympathy was rare in those days; though, on the other hand, she did not mind how many Bretons were hanged on trees, and found *Brezonnec* the most absurd language. *Somme toute*, practically everyone finds de Sévigné delicious, as did Mme. de Coulanges, who pestered her to leave her "damp Rochers" and was snubbed prettily for her pains. **Madame de Maintenon** (1635-1719) takes lower rank as a writer of letters. Françoise d'Aubigné knew the Meuse, and on 28 May, 1692, sent an amusingly sad account of Dinant (Dinandium) to Mme. de Veilhan. "The roads are," she says, "indescribable, and gave Mme. de Villeneuve the 'vapours.'" "Unplucked chickens cost 30 sous; meat 8 the pound, and bad at that." She almost agrees with Suson, her chambermaid, that "the King was 'wrong to take such places from the enemy, who should be welcome to them.'" "The French King 'had the gout in both feet and the English King, 'William III., would be late in succouring Namur.'" The whole letter is one of the best by Mme. de Maintenon, generally so serious, and is given—in part—as a contrast to her usual style. Mme. Scarron had suffered, and even on the steps of the throne, as has been said, was ill at ease often. From such a woman nothing like the gaiety or *abandon* of Mme. de

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Sévigné could be expected. Saint-Simon, who was none of her admirers, says that "she wrote singularly "well and readily." His qualifying her language as "doux, juste en tous points et naturellement éloquent "et court" shows his honesty and her good style.

## XXI.

### The Ferney Philosopher.

BUT I am in a hurry to reach **Voltaire** (1694-1778). François-Marie Arouet, who at 20 rebaptised himself Voltaire, was, about the same time, imprisoned in the Bastille, for satirising, it was thought, the Court morals. The *Henriade* was "put on the stocks" and *Œdipe* composed in jail. From the putting of the latter on the boards until the *Irène* was played, in 1778, 60 years passed, years replete with Voltaire's work in every branch. I touch lightly on the tithe of a tithe. His expulsion from France and importation into England did him good. Unlike most of his countrymen, he learned English, tongue, manners and customs. The trace of Great Britain is in the *Brutus* tragedy of 1730 and, specially, in the *Lettres anglaises* of 1734, burnt by the public executioner. The divine Émilie, whom men called the marquise du Châtelet, claimed him and made him write philosophy, criticism, physics, mathematics and plays. A year after her death he was induced to "work for the King of Prussia."

Besides recriminations and final departure for Voltaire, his Berlin-Potsdam Prussianising gave literature the *Siècle de Louis XIV.* After "feeling his feet" for a time, he started country gentleman in earnest in 1760, at Ferney. Like the late Marquis of Anglesey, he built himself (but not, perhaps, out of a chapel) a theatre. Here he had his own plays acted, even those

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that nothing could applaud but undue sympathy withheld. History was now enriched by his *Peter the Great* (1763), *Louis XV.* (1768), *Paris Parliament* (1769); his Deism and anti-Christianity were represented by the *Philosophic Dictionary* (1764). With him, however—as since, and, to some extent, now, in France—Christianity means only Catholicism. Thus, he worked hard to rehabilitate the memory of the Protestant, Calas, executed in 1762, and that of Lally-Tollendal. But opium and coffee *plus* 64 years of unremitting work carried him off in 1778, after a triumphal return to Paris, like another Alcibiades (to Athens). One can no more appraise him morally than catalogue or criticise the literature of the man. The French politely remind us that there have been Cæsars. They say he (Voltaire) advanced their language, ideas, and habits right rapidly in Europe. They invite us to remember that their Revolution, which we are to commend, *bien entendu*, their Revolution as understood by the *Assemblée constituante*, was practically all Voltaire's. They hint that "liberty for all" and such (now well-worn) watchwords were first proclaimed as planks in Arouet's platform. Lastly (for the nonce), they say that the Ferney patriarch's damage to religion has long ago collapsed by the very weight of the lies he told against religion. These propositions do not seem hard to rebut.

I pass to the criticism of some of his works. He did not succeed—*communi consensu*—as much as he fondly conceived, in asymptotic perfection epic and tragic. The lighter pieces are naturally more finished. His prose is perhaps, even from the French standpoint,



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superior to his verse. His ideas are as dead as himself, but his style is living as that of Pascal or Bossuet—simple and clear, *sine fuco ac fallaciis*. His complete works make up 60 to 80 big volumes—verse, history, philosophy, correspondence. Of the first, the tragedy, then over-admired, is now considered something wooden, and his drama unduly philosophic. One is drilled to admire his grace and naturalness in light poesy, though his epic effort—the *Henriade*—has fallen into complete discredit. Even the happy idea of joining St. Louis to the trio—Discord, Love and Truth—did not, we infer, save the *Henriade*. And yet there should be great virtue in such junction, resembling the addition of an ounce of gold to butter and eggs and a pound of cheese, and the square root extraction of the result. He was a hard worker, this *esprit fort*. For 40 years, Voltaire toiled at his history. *Charles XII.*, *Louis XIV.*, and the *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* stand out remarkable. The first is original, to a large extent. The second is wanting in unity, incomplete. His correspondence shows him at his worst and at his best. In this it resembles Cicero's, which was never intended for publication (unlike the Younger Pliny's), and so shows up every flaw in that vain Roman Consul's character. Apropos, *Catilina, ou Rome Sauvée* (1752) is one of the most celebrated among the 27 tragedies of Voltaire. Others are *Mariamne*, *La mort de César* (1735), *Mérope* (1743), *Sémiramis* (1748), *Tancrède* (1760). When this reforming tragedian boasted of his improvements, especially in enhancing movement, d'Alembert said: "Corneille



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"disserte, Racine converse, vous nous remuerez." The tragic reformer did not scruple to give the rules of tragedy, fallen short of lamentably by Corneille, it seems, and by Voltaire, very surely. Neither was this reformer above appropriating and recasting Crébillon's *Catilina*. True, he paid back the poet with affectation of contempt. Voltaire, then, did much harm and some good. The one is hard to estimate, and the other almost lost in the fulness of the evil. His big prose works have had, probably, most influence on literature and *littérateurs*. Ardent, full of knowledge, clear, he was wanting in and despised depth. What he could not do was not worth doing, in his eyes, and he could not dive deep down or attain unto the fulness of the height of things. This limits his excellence to the light and fugitive: in airy, ephemeral writing he was past master. What he did not understand he made as though he believed not. His belief, however, was shown by his painstaking efforts to destroy what he affected not to believe. We know the proverbial cause of the Devil's *tremolo*. Voltaire's very reason had set a trap for him, and with marked success. His strength is his weakness. Led astray by the will o' the wisp of his own great powers, he has fallen into the quagmire that the *ignis fatuus* concealed by excess of light. "Be not over-clever" is the lesson of Arouet's career. Plato's Cave folk (in his allegory) take shadows for realities. Voltaire took his own great abilities for inspiration of absolute truth. Those abilities were as wandering and capricious as they were great. His range was immense,

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but his touch was often so light as to leave little or no mark.

"We know only too well," says M. Géroze, "that the *Henriade* is not the only epic of Voltaire: the second we dare not name, even to condemn. How comes it that a poet, that a Frenchman has dared assume the *ton badin* of Ariosto, blending therewith the *cynisme* of Apuleius, on the subject of the chaste heroine whose miraculous intervention saved France? Neither a libertine wit nor the irreligion of the Century can explain this outrage: these depraved tastes could have been otherwise satisfied." The critic goes on to divide the blame between the country and Voltaire. "That France possesses a long obscene poem is a calamity and a stain, but that it travesties and sullies the fairest page of our annals is the chastisement of culpable indifference." M. Géroze had not seen the recrudescence of this crusade against *la Pucelle*, the book following the class-room strictures of M. Thalamas (whom the French Government transferred to another Lycée) and the so-called historical work of M. Anatole France. The Blessed Jehanne may be safely left to Mr. Andrew Lang, who is her knight and champion, loyal and true. On the whole, too, it seems safe and charitable, in speaking of such a man as Arouet, to steer as even a keel as possible "between anathema and apotheosis," supposing always that at this time of day the public is interested enough in him either to curse or to bless.

## XXII. "L'Esprit des lois."

**Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu** (1689—1755), became "conseiller au Parlement de Bordeaux," as did Montaigne in his time. In 1718 he was M. le président de Montesquieu, member of the Bordeaux Académie in 1716 and soon author of *la Politique des Romains dans la religion*. He scored a big success in 1721 with his *Lettres persanes*, which let him later into the *Académie française*. Visiting Austria, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Holland, and England, he brooded over all he saw, and, in 1734, published his *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur et de la décadence des Romains*. This was followed by the *Esprit des lois*, in 1748, and his *Défense* of the same in 1750. He died, *really* regretted, in 1755. Other works of his are the *Temple de Gnide*, *Lettres*, and an *Essai sur le goût*.

Montesquieu's own description of his *Esprit des lois* is that "its scope is immense, that he distinguishes and "examines all human institutions, seeking their origin "and causes, moral or physical." The strange accusation—would that it were commoner!—was made against the *Esprit des lois* that it was *esprit* pure and simple, a lavishing of *esprit*. A man according to such accusers cannot legitimately write wittily on a dry subject. They ignore or are ignorant of the fact that one joke, old and hoary but living, adorned the pages of L. and S.'s *Greek Lexicon*; that the author of

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*Alice in Wonderland*—in my own Oxford days, also—cracked jokes in his Algebra lectures; that the time-honoured *Art of Pluck*, famous in our grandfathers' days, had cold-blooded jests on Trigonometry! Others, on the contrary, will have it that Montesquieu and Rousseau, after Voltaire, are the two most famous creators of the current of opinion directly leading to the Revolution. Even my lord Chesterfield, whom Montesquieu met at Venice and in Holland, would allow, probably, a proper kind of wit properly scintillating in a gentlemanly manner—the *desipere in loco*. (Of *taste*, on which he wrote in the *Encyclopédie*, our author knew something). Besides, it has been found that "l'esprit français se relève . . . par le génie dans "Montesquieu, Voltaire et Buffon." The *Esprit des lois* is half a Melchizedek; "prolem sine matre "creatam" Montesquieu himself calls it, meaning that it is original. He considered it also a "work of pure "politics and of pure jurisprudence." Its great defect is chaotic arrangement—its plan being in the last lines of Book I., and its complete conclusion in Book XXIX. Errors, inexactitudes and paradoxes teem; an epigram serves as definition, an antithesis as fresh thought; quotations are garbled occasionally. His style is too concise and obscure, *staccato*, flowery. We are bidden admire in him the thinker, not the stylist, "un génie heureux et profond, qui pense et fait "penser." Our Newton and Locke had their share in making him think, also Cujas, Jean Domat, Pascal's literary executor, and, possibly, J.-B Vico. Professor Hastie says: Montesquieu's great work "came too

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"late to save France from the political errors that culminated in the Revolution, but it inspired and guided its greatest men."

His *Causes of Roman greatness and fall* (1734) some call his ablest work, including as it does the first real application to history of the modern scientific "spirit" (if we may use the word, without any French connotation of *goguenardise*, in connexion with Montesquieu). The idea was not his. Bossuet, in his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle*, had sought to pour the full light of his great intelligence on the human causes of the (progress and) decadence of empires generally, and the Roman in particular. This was 50 years before Montesquieu. Bossuet put down all to chance, with odds on the best man (for the divine is almost sporting in his language: "à tout prendre, il en arrive à peu près comme dans le jeu, où le plus habile l'emporte à la longue"). Tacitus, we know, thought all depended on cycles. Bossuet was too much occupied to work out his own theory, and to Montesquieu fell this heritage of an old man in a hurry. *Décadence* takes up 16 out of 23 chapters composing the work, *grandeur* having only the first seven. Montesquieu is more detailed and political than Bossuet, but less philosophic. Charles de Secondat's book is more useful reading—"should be the breviary of such as are called to govern others," writes Voltaire of the *Esprit des lois*, and the sentence stands good of the "Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur et de la décadence des Romains." By the way, has anybody remarked what a cant word is this same term "*bréviaire*"? Here we have Montesquieu's work so

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dubbed. "C'est le bréviaire des honnêtes gens," said Cardinal du Perron of Montaigne's *Essais*. "Nous autres ignorants étions perdus si ce livre ne nous eût retirés du bourbier . . . c'est notre bréviaire," writes Montaigne himself of Jacques Amyot, "translateur" of Plutarch's *Lives*. "Bréviaire" must have been formerly in France the "gag" that "liberté" now is there, or that "mandate" is with us. "Liberté" in Modern France means, among other things, preventing Republicans *manu militari* from doing what they have always done before. In England each Party in politics is ever appealing to an imaginary "mandate" of the People to do what the opposite party dislikes. By dint of repetition these cant terms become their own dilution. Ernest Renan probably meant "bréviaire," also, when he said he would die happy could he believe his works would grace the fair French hand of a church-going dame or demoiselle, gloved and pious.



## XXIII. Jean-Jacques.

VERY different were the political ideas of **J.-J. Rousseau** (1712—1778) from those of Montesquieu, his senior by 23 years. Jean-Jacques, son of a Geneva watchmaker, was brought up, or rather “dragged up,” pretty much anyhow. But his literary milk was Plutarch, not the usual Seneca. Originally a Protestant, he changed his religion with the ease of a Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), being, like him, a *'vert* and *revert*, to go back to the religious slang of the Seventies. Graver, groom, musician, séminariste, bagman, teacher, music copier, protégé of Mme. de Warens, he was given the Dijon Academy prize for “sustaining” his paradox against civilisation as a factor in the purity of manners (1750). He now jumped to sudden fame, at the age of 38. Some of his works are : *Devin de Village* (1752), *Inégalité des conditions* (1754), *Les Spectacles* (1758), *Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761), *Contrat Social* (1762), *Emile ou de l'éducation* (1762); others, as *Confessions* and *Rêveries*, were brought out after his death, as publishing was forbidden him in France after 1762. Misanthropical and paradoxical, he abandoned his children and kept his unworthy “compagne” with him, mostly at the expense of others. France alternately petted and tried to imprison him. He did not like Switzerland much, nor England at all. He was naturally good, too good. Without any moral sense whatever, he was bad, too bad. To be natural and naïf is, perhaps, not enough : it was not in the case of Goldsmith. Candour and franchise are excellent,



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but British insular hypocrisy is preferable to some things in the *Confessions*. There, among other barings of his bosom in the *genre* of the Salvation Army, he throws mud on his benefactors of both sexes. But he was not sorry, like the folk that confess publicly in the "Barracks." Even as Montaigne, in his *Institution des enfants*, he cannot be taken as a guide in life-conduct. He speaks of his vices and of that "snowy peccadillo," which in him multiplied itself noticeably, with wondrous calm. If he had to live a second life, he would follow the same *penchants*, unless his second life fell on a period of more exquisite viciousity. In Jean-Jacques pride and sickliness helped each other, interacting. Had he not been so sickly, he had not been so conceited; and had he not been eaten up with conceit, as with a cancer, he had not been so unwholesome a subject. It was not the fault of Society that he had been a *laquais*, that his education was defective, that he was born and long remained poor. He chose to lay the blame at Society's door. So much the worse for Jean-Jacques Rousseau. His misanthropy hurt nobody; contrariwise, it and his paradox make a pretty blend in his writings. Literary French has been influenced largely by these. *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) was originally called "*Lettres de deux amants, habitants d'une petite ville au pied des Alpes*" and continued the series of *Gil Blas* (1715, 1724, 1735). (*Gil Blas*, like Rousseau, was not French and was a *laquais*.) Psychology enshrined in enchanting style became monotonous in the time-honoured vehicle of letters. Some of us in our youth, and (no doubt) for our sins

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which were scarlet, have read Smollett—a romance in endless letters! Peradventure we have groaned in the spirit, but, fleshed with interest, have gone on . . . on to the bitter end. I pass to *Émile ou de l'éducation* (1762). This aspires to philosophy, and to what is harder, bringing up children. Rousseau, we have seen, sent his away—"gaillardement et sans scrupules," to the *Enfants trouvés*. Difficult now in France, and impossible in England, making one's progeny State Property sounds a heaven-born system, and Spartan, besides. *Émile*, however, does not go to the Poor House, he is not "farmed," though he is an orphan, which Jean-Jacques' infants were not. Solomon's and Guy Patin's idea, that "young barbarians" must be beaten and made into men by education, was not Rousseau's, who said: "Tout est bien, sortant des mains de l'auteur des êtres, tout dégénère entre les mains de l'homme." *Émile*'s teacher, then, teaches him nothing—consciously, and the boy starts re-inventing things, like Pascal (aged 12) with geometry. Languages, living and dead, are tabooed, but a craft is allowed the youth, as it is in the Hohenzollern family. Like the Kaiser, St. Joseph, or the Christ, he becomes a carpenter, for the prophetic—if inconsequent—reason that "nous approchons de l'état de crise et du siècle des révolutions." This was in 1762. What good joinering was to do *Émile* among Rousseau's disciples, the best Vitruviuses of ruin that the world has ever seen, is not expounded. At 18, *Émile* has finished his books, and must enquire into the delicate question of having or not having a soul.

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The *vicaire savoyard* helps him, with Deistic eloquence. The *vicaire* is of a type familiar to-day. His voice is the voice of Rousseau, and *Émile* is what the author calls it: "rêveries d'un visionnaire sur l'éducation," chimæras dire, blended "divagations insensées" (to quote another) and sage counsel. But enough of *Émile*. I should wish only to compare it with what is attributed to James Mill, in his education of his son, John Stuart Mill. Naturally, in real life, as in the visionary's *roman*, the child admires the Bible, or things religious, when artistic or æsthetically appealing, but rejects Christianity. "No man, after drinking old wine." . . . No man, who has read Thucydides, loves over-much the *Hellenics*, "a descent truly mournful." No man, or boy, fed on the last chapters of *Isaiah*, takes kindly, unaided, to the *Gospels*.

The *Contrat Social* ! What misery it gave us in the Oxford College lectures, when we were dying to be out and about instead of doing Political Philosophy ! This *Principe du droit politique* appeared the same year as *Émile* (1762), rests equally on a paradox, and was caused, or originated, by the reading of the *Esprit des lois* of Montesquieu. The People alone are to govern ; majorities (absolute, apparently) should impose their authority, and their decisions are infallible. *Députés* are not allowed. Would Jean-Jacques approve of Modern France? of the *députés*, who pay themselves at their own sweet will, and who lately raised their salaries so notably? of the *vicaires*, *savoyards* and other, being cut off, with the *curés*,

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from living *de l'autel*, as before? The *Confessions* (published in 1782) were written by Rousseau on his return from England, and are happily *sui generis*. St. Augustine's *Confessions* are those of a penitent and the son of a penitent. We hear of the robbed orchard; of St. Monica's tippling habits, until the servant put her to shame. The Saint puts sackcloth on his head, as it were, and prays, humbling himself. Rousseau's is only a sham-confession, of which the real name is bravado,—glorying in his shame wildly, madly. Not being strong in *cultes*, I do not know accurately whether the *culte* in Jean-Jacques Rousseau is dead. Two of the earliest *fanatiques de Rousseau* were Robespierre and Marat: the principle of the *Terreur* was the application of the *Contrat social* theories.

## XXIV. The Encyclopédie.

AFTER the man whom his country of adoption expelled for his *Émile*, come for our consideration in brief one who, like Zola, could never enter the Académie, and his *collaborateur*, secrétaire perpétuel of that august body. **Denis Diderot** (1713-1784) and **Jean Le Rond d'Alembert** are arrangers and publishers of the "Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres." Illustrious personages, we are told, subscribed, in advance and without any premonitory qualms, to such a harmless work as this seemed. Louis XV. gave a "privilegium" to Diderot and his printer. But on the appearance of its "maxims tending to destroy royal authority" and to favour "the corruption of morals, irreligion and incredulity," the King's Council suppressed it. Really, Diderot was indifferent in morals, and had never won any spurs for King and altar. As the work broke out again in 1753, and a volume appeared yearly up to 1757, the Parliament of 1759 hurled a more blazing bolt of interdiction, turned into *brutum fulmen* by Mme. de Pompadour, de Choiseul, de Malesherbes and public opinion. (d'Alembert had given up in 1758.) Diderot's *Dictionnaire* was now to hail nominally from Amsterdam, and, to the horror of the "arranger," the printer weeded some articles. Herculean efforts succeeded in having published the *Encyclopédie*, which consists of 28 folio volumes (1751-1772). From 1776-1777 appeared the *Suppléments*; in 1780, the *Volumes de tables raisonnées*. For

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size and difficulties surmounted, seldom has such a work been completed so soon. There we have the whole XVIII. Century, aspirations, illusions, rashness, evil passions. Travestying Horace, one may say of Diderot's Dictionary: "As the potter's wheel runs on, "why comes forth a machine of war?" Rapid notes on literature are not the place for politics, philosophy, religion, *morale*. Behold, they are written in the Book of Diderot and d'Alembert, of Voltaire and Rousseau, of Dumarsais and de Prades, of Condorcet and Turgot, of Marmontel and Daubenton!

The list of writers in the *Encyclopédie* is not exhausted. "There is a sea, and who shall quench "it?" There is a "gulf," as Diderot himself named it, wherein "hacks and rag pickers" flung an endless "lot of things disreputable, dyspeptic; good, bad, "abominable; true, false, uncertain—always incoherent and ill-assorted." Diderot's own "stuff" is not first rate always, written as it is in general against time. Strangely enough, with all its *toupet* as a rule, the *Encyclopédie* is a craven and sounds no certain note on Language and Literature. We remember that a French translation (by Mills) of Chambers' *Cyclopædia* formed the original basis of this organ of the *Encyclopédistes*, the most advanced Revolutionaries of the time. Of these Diderot himself, fiery and passionate, more philosophical than Voltaire and less fluid, is an epitomé of the Century's virtues, vices, convictions. He continued to the end with his editing. d'Alembert, before breaking like the Psalmist's bow and bending before the storm of King and Church, wrote the preface with a certain dry simplicity: in it



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is the family tree of human knowledge. Other *Encyclopédistes* are foreigners, who wrote, like Frédéric II. himself, in French: le baron d'Holbach (1723-1789) and Helvétius (1715-1771)—apostles (respectively) of Selfishness reared into a system, and of the sin against the Holy Ghost, or as near as the author of *De l'Esprit* could get to it. In his preface, or *Discours préliminaire*, to the *Encyclopédie*, d'Alembert speaks flatteringly of Buffon's *Natural History*: perhaps, he ineffectually wished to draw him into the net of his literary contributors.



## XXV.

### “ Les manchettes de Buffon.”

Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707-1788), began by translating from English. English, we have seen, has become quite fashionable during the XVIII. Century. If Saint-Evremond (1613-1703), who died as the Century began, after 40 years in the desert of our fog-bound isle, could or would say nothing in our barbarous *baragouin*, Voltaire, in 1726, 1727, 1728, 1729, learned our “idiome”—we are told and we somewhat believe—to read and to write. Arouet was the first important Frenchman to learn our language, men, manners, authors. Montesquieu (1689-1755) we have seen affecting, or being affected by, Lord Chesterfield, and studying our philosophers in their own Cimmerian land, where men kill game in fine weather (so-called) and themselves in November. We find him passing a short two years there. Like Montesquieu, in another respect, Buffon studied science—geometry and physics—after his visit to the S. of France (he was a Montbard man), Italy, Switzerland, and England. Specialising in Natural Science from 1739 (when he was appointed intendant du Jardin du Roi) he brought out in 29 volumes his works, which chiefly comprise the *Histoire naturelle* and *Époques de la Nature*. We owe Buffon’s *Discours sur le style* to the peculiar circumstances attending his admission to the Académie française in 1753. Not wishing to damn, out and out or with faint praise, his predecessor

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in the fauteuil, he shirked his Academic duty and spoke on style. This was surely better, though against all precedent, than to wallow in any or many of the Sens archbishop's religious squabbles on paper! Less than two months before his reception, Buffon seems to have expected the Spirit to move him: "il me viendra peut-être quelque inspiration, comme à Marie Alacoque, et je ne parlerai pas d'elle, de peur du coq-à-l'âne." Of course, the *Discours sur le style* is not in good style! Certain Frenchmen go further: "it is neither very well written nor excellently composed." The average man finds it good enough for him, and inevitably cites "le style est l'homme," whereas the text always adds *même* after *l'homme* and sometimes *de* after *est*. His countrymen find that Buffon did well to emphasise the value of style, as his own reputation as *savant* will write, perhaps has written, itself on water. He rejected the classification of Linné, his rival and foe. He was capable of paradox. Other works are: *Théorie de la terre* and a *Discours* for his *Natural History*. With the delicious exaggeration to which we are accustomed, a critic of his own country finds Buffon more bold and *eloquent* than Aristotle: perhaps, for "Aristotle" read "Demos-thenes"? M. Villemain does not find him monotonous. Buffon was happy in his life, and in the year of his death, 1788, twelve months or less before the outbreak of the Revolution that slew his only son, as it killed André Chénier in 1794.

To shirk criticising his *Natural History*, as Voltaire did, by uttering three words "Pas si naturelle!" is flippant. And that a man should never be. To

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swear that he put on his Court dress when he began to write, (1) in *le style "à manchettes,"* his eulogy of the goose, or his comparison of the eagle and lion, is false. And this, again, is vanity, and smacks of Voltaire. Besides, if Montaigne's fine head rested on the pillow of doubt, why should not the comte de Buffon write with quills by day and sleep on plumage by night? "La plus belle *plume* du siècle" is Rousseau's name for him, in apt and Capitolian defence.

But the Century of Revolutions is closing, and I must catch *pièces littéraires* as they come, and go. The great storm was preceded, as usual, by a great calm in politics, when literature flourished passably well.

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(1) Something equally awful is whispered quite currently of Goethe's dress for writing!

## XXVI. "Figaro."

**Beaumarchais** (1732—1799) is preceded by Diderot, our old friend of the *Encyclopédie*, reforming the theatre this time with his *discours-manifeste* "*Sur la poésie dramatique.*" Beaumarchais is followed by that *Ducis* who tried to do what Voltaire had not attempted on his return from London—acclimatise Shakespeare in Paris, where now it flourishes. His "Divine Williams" is quite French. As the spirit of Beaumarchais and of Lesage is Spanish, and as one of the best and earliest (*no solo una de las primeras de su género en la literatura española, sino tambien una de las mejores*) is a *novela* of Lope Felix de Vega, I add a Spanish description of the same: "Una novela "in prosa, intitulada 'el peregrino en su patria,' ... en "1603 ... Es la historia de dos amantes que, despues "de correr varias aventuras por España y Portugal, "son cautivados por los Moros, y vuelven por ultimo "en peregrinacia à España, pasando por Italia. "Primero los hallamos naufragos en Barcelona en cuya "cuidad ... el desembace se verifica en Toledo, donde "los dos amantes se casan con acuerdo y plauso de sus "amigos. La época es indeterminada, los episodios "están ingeniosamente enlazados con el cuerpo principal de la historia, y además el libre contiene varias "poesías, conpuestas sin duda en diversas ocasiones, "y cietos dramas que seguramente se representaron "en las circunstancias allí descritas."

To anyone who has read Petronius (and who has not?) there does not seem much original in the above.

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Pierre-Augustin Carron was the real name of Beaumarchais; as Poquelin of Molière, and Arouet of Voltaire. Like Voltaire, too, Beaumarchais had a business habit, so rare in men of genius, and made money in Court circles. Later, the Revolution relieved him of this. His *dramas bourgeois* à la Diderot failing, he fell back on his own jolly temperament and on the theatre's *ancienne et franche gaité*, as he called what he imitated and embodied in his "*Barbier de Séville, ou la Précaution inutile*" (1775) and his "*La Folle Journée, ou le Mariage de Figaro*" (1784). "Figaro" succeeded in an unprecedented manner, being almost—in the judgment of some—as brilliantly witty as Molière's masterpieces. "Figaro," as a character, is, humanly speaking, from everlasting to everlasting. We all remember the gentleman in Horace and "tonsonis in umbris," who was manicuring. We all know the garrulous barber, a bit of a scamp and much of a wit—he is ubiquitous; his cunning, intrigue and dexterity as Almaviva's valet are beyond all praise, or blame. (Since 1854 he has given his name to a Parisian paper). Quite recently in France I have been able to laugh at real Beaumarchais, but in England it seems "better form" to imbibe one's Franco-Spanish humour filtered through Mozart and Rossini. It is so good to be good and to take one's pleasure sadly. Beaumarchais had good and evil in his life, *mes six époques* (1793), as he calls them. Deaf in his declining years, he died in 1799. But he had had his share of this world's goods—a handsome person, two rich widows as wives, a rich banker (Duverney) as financial "back" and as an advertisement of his

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championing public rights, on the same banker's death. The *Mémoires du Sieur Beaumarchais par lui-même* (1774-1778) appear at this epoch, and show the author to be no mean *frondeur*. Indeed he is said to have made Voltaire fear he must look to his laurels as *débiteur* of satire (and logic). Editing that satirist was ruinous to Beaumarchais, now accused, also, of trying to sell arms to Holland, and obliged to fly for his life. He had lived too long, though he was only 67.

It may be fanciful, but something of an analogy suggests itself here and there between Beaumarchais, *né* Carron, and Defoe, *né* Foe. The works of both will live, and the personal characters of both are ambiguous. Harley was to Defoe what Duverney was to Beaumarchais. Each was happy in business, tortuous in politics. Each was embarrassed financially, though Defoe died rich, after all. Bowing in the house of Rimmon, the Pomegranate god, suited both, on occasion. Defoe served with Monmouth, though I do not remember his figuring in Conan Doyle's *Micah Clarke*. Beaumarchais fled Paris on accusation of arming, or trying to arm, his country's enemy. Each writer was, or feigned to be, true to the Revolutionary principles of his time and land. In his *genre* of composition, each is all but first—Beaumarchais only second to Molière, and Defoe to Swift. Of course, Beaumarchais copies Molière shamelessly, more nakedly than Regnard. *Figaro* is *Scapin*, *Basile* is *Tartufe*, etc. But the copyist goes to Lesage and *Gil Blas* for the dresses; to the city or environs of Seville for his *locus in quo*. *Male moratæ*, as



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Horace would insist, the plays scintillate with wit, with repartee, with *esprit de saillie*, golden clap-trap which would have been dross in Molière's eyes, but "took" in 1775, when Jean-Baptiste Poquelin "ruled low." Lesage had made *Gil Blas* French. Beaumarchais restores him his clothes and rechristens him. Even in Welsh we have *Bardd Cwsg* stolen from Quevedo y Villegas, and quite acclimatised to Wales. *Twm o'r Nant*, again, stole from the *Bardd*, as Beaumarchais from Lesage's work. Without Spain, there would be no Lesage, no *picaresque* novel, no Smollett, no Dickens, no followers of Dickens in France or elsewhere.



## XXVII. Chénier.

THE XVIII. Century, so rich in prose and versification, does not close without one *poet*, in the strict sense of the term. **André de Chénier** (1762-1794), born in Constantinople, of a French father—the then Consul—and of a Greek mother, had passed round among his friends some exquisite verse when that Revolution broke out which was to kill him. *Le Mendiant*, *l'Aveugle*, *Suzanne*, *l'Invention*, *Hermès* (Lucretian), *La Jeune Captive*, *Le Jeune Malade*, *Versailles* are among André de Chénier's best known works. His poems have been fifty-nine years in process of publication, 1819-1878, and include, besides fragments, *Idylles*, *Élégies*, short *Poèmes*, *Hymnes*, *Odes*, *Iambes* of vengeance from Saint-Lazare prison. He is, poetically, two men,—a Grecian (or Hellenist, in spirit), son of a Greek woman of beauty and wit, who sipped from Homer and Theocritus above all, and who was as French as his father, loving Racine like a Gaul and understanding La Fontaine, which in French eyes no foreigner can do. A reformer, de Chénier was no pedant; a poet, he was caviare to the general; understanding the Poetic Principle, whereon E. A. Poe afterwards lectured, he saw the continuity of Hellenic and French poesy. At least, the French affect to believe, perhaps do believe, this. To the ordinary reader, however, even André de Chénier has nothing to compare with John Keats' *Odes on a Grecian Urn*, *to Maia*, *to Pan*,

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to *Psyché*. His *Ode à la Jeune Captive* has been endlessly quoted, his prison *Iambes* compared with those of Archilochus, as Gilbert's satire is put into the balance with Juvenal. But we are accustomed to that in Modern France, or in Modern Greece. The recipe is simplicity itself: Take the very biggest names in antiquity in connexion with any type of literature, make another list of modern imitators at the most respectful of distances, then compare the *servum pecus* with the old original stock. On occasion, go one step further, and explain how the genius nearer our time has improved on the old Greek or Roman.

## XXVIII.

### “Paul and Virginia” and “René.”

ANOTHER extreme to which it is now fashionable to go is to attack one's own great men. Thus, it has been found that **Bernardin de Saint-Pierre** (1734-1814) was anything but what his *Paul et Virginie* (1788) might make us think. We are now invited to see in this friend of Rousseau a very mediocre character. All we care for, however, is to know and feel, as we do in reading the book, that the natural scenery in *Paul and Virginia* is idyllic, that the sentiments are pure, that a charming spirit reigns supreme in the little work. Again, M. Anatole le Braz, a Breton-speaking Breton, is making a fierce onslaught on Chateaubriand (1788-1848). He had already demolished and made appear a forger à la Macpherson the genial Villemarqué. It is now the turn of **François René, Vicomte de Chateaubriand**, who for M. le Braz is as great a liar as Voltaire's "Pucelle" . . . *laisse à désirer*. To the eye of vulgar (logic and) history, Chateaubriand lived in London\* in great want after the Revolutionary earlier "events;" compared ancient and modern upheavals with the French Revolution (1797); published *Atala* (1800), the *Génie du Christianisme* (1802), *René* (1805), *Martyrs* (1809), his *Journey to Jerusalem* (1811). He seems to have been paid in his life-time that *post obitum*, his *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*. For excellence, the *Abencerages* is that work of his which usually is bracketed

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\* and Beccles and Bungay.

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with the *Itinéraire de Paris à Jérusalem*. Of the above, the *Martyrs* is believed now to prove the contrary of what the Vicomte wished. (So Milton has shown that Satan is not only the Prince of this world but his own hero, though the poet apparently wished to make the Just Cause first and foremost.) *René*, being the author's autobiography (as so often Byron's heroes are himself), is dangerous reading, we are told to-day. Chateaubriand has sinned horribly, we are assured, against good taste and Boileau's canon, in his *Génie du Christianisme, ou Beautés de la religion chrétienne*. Has he not, in fact, "bedizened with gay "ornaments the awful mysteries of a Christian's "faith"? Are not the salient qualities of Chateaubriand pride and selfishness? Did he not live in eternal demi-solitude, sunk in the deep ennui of which his finest works bear trace? One understands the reason of attacking the Vicomte, whose work in part synchronised with the epoch of the Concordat, now that that Instrument has been torn, not rescinded, and that openly believing means being permanently shelved for promotion in the "Church's Eldest Daughter."

The *Génie du Christianisme* Sainte-Beuve called a *coup de théâtre et d'autel*. It focussed the then reaction against scepticism, and helped to send the author to Rome in 1803, as Secretary to the Embassy. But it was from Old Rome to New Rome, according to Sainte-Beuve, that he transferred the capital of prose, with his Lower Empire style, his Byzantine imagery and sentiment. Illogical, inconsistent in politics, as unstable as Byron, whom he called his

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pupil, or as his master in anti-social propaganda, Rousseau—Chateaubriand founded the School of Romanticism, standing first in description of weird, wild Nature. He has made French give up more than it ever did before out of its treasures of style—its colouring, its ornateness, its vivid glow.

Chateaubriand had as assistant, from 1802, in his attempts at renovating and reforming style, a woman, of whom good and the reverse have been spoken, but only good as regards her composition. She *could* write—write, that is, in her own way, with her own *cachet*. She wished to do most things her own way, and that was the cause of the trouble between her and Napoleon. The Suffragettes will not see eye to eye with me, but I have an infinite pity for Bonaparte. My reason I may, perhaps, make clear through the darkness of a parable, a real event. A whilom friend was *en villégiature*: the hour of lunch was near: a blue stocking of the bluest was announced. My whilom friend was no coward, and a scholar of no mean sort, but he trembled in his inmost soul. Lunch began, and the floodgates of female knowledge opened upon my whilom comrade. Like Mark Twain's hero, he answered everything in negative monosyllables and knew no one in the whole world of letters, art, science. The noise of the great waters went on—but he was as mute as the fish of Sophocles (or of Natural History). His mind was an apparent blank upon every subject broached, his politeness was exquisite. The lady winced visibly, pensively reflected—and left. But this was just what **Anne Louise Germaine Necker, Mme. de Staël**, would not do, except when Napoleon

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interdicted her from fire and water, like another Publius Clodius cutting off the commons, or "scanting the sizes," of another Marcus Tullius Cicero. In 1803 she was ordered to keep 40 leagues off Paris. The Directory had already suggested her leaving Lutetia for Coppet. Her father, the illustrious Swiss minister of Louis XVI., had brought her up to letters, and her mother had loved Edward Gibbon when at Lausanne: she was, then, fated to be literary. *Letters on Rousseau's writings and character* (1788), *Delphine* (1802), *Réflexions sur le Procès de la Reine* (1793), *Réflexions sur la Paix intérieure* (1795), *Essai sur les Fictions*, *De l'Influence des Passions* (1796), *de la littérature considérée dans ses Rapports avec les Institutions sociales* (1800), *Life of Necker*, *Corinne*, *Considérations sur la Révolution française* (unfinished and published posthumously, like her *Dix années d'exil*). In 1810 she finished *De l'Allemagne*, and went to Chaumont to see it through the press, when 10,000 copies, struck off, were seized by Savary, and she was ordered off to Coppet. We do not hear whether she was personally conducted by Napoleon's orders, as was Mgr. Montagnini lately by command of Clemenceau. The then John Murray got hold of a MS. of the *Germany*, and printed it in 1813. Mme. de Staël's present renown is not equal to what it was during her life and even for some time after her death. She is considered to have influenced Guizot and the Doctrinaires; also, Lamartine and the Romantic school. Now people generally find her tiresome with her over-sensibility, under-creativity and carelessness of style. Her courage and novelty of view have left



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some influence, however, on French literature. Especially noticeable is the *Allemagne*, where she studies Goethe and Schiller, Teutonic manners, arts, philosophy, morals and religion. Her object, as and more than Chateaubriand's in his work, is to root in France "la littérature romantique ou chevaleresque." Her ignorance made her unfair to Classicism, to Bossuet, Pascal, Molière and La Fontaine. An agent of Napoleon wrote to her to say that her book was not French, as who should accuse a British author of being "un-English," that question-begging term. First, Necker, her father, was from Geneva, as was J. J. Rousseau; secondly, it was not "un-French" to show the good of Schiller and Goethe even to those inimitable stylists, the Classical school, and to their admirers. Coming to her conversational powers, we are told that one lady wished to be a queen, only to order Mme. de Staël to talk to her for ever, apparently. On the other hand, he that was King and more than King, Napoleon, received her, at their first meeting, with studied coldness. (Later, this became severity against her.) In 1803, Goethe was only negatively pleased with her arrival in Weimar, and Schiller was pleased when she went away. Where, then, is appreciation of her *causerie*? Perhaps she "disimproved" on acquaintance and repeated herself. Like the fire of stubble, she may have begun excellently well, but died out rapidly. When, like the *Ancient Mariner*, she fastened upon you ("button-holed" will not apply to a lady), you could not seek relief from her eloquence in the harvest of her eye—she was not good looking—nor in the studied detail of her dress—she did not

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robe herself with taste. Her works live after her, and these we can admire more than read, as many men do now with the *Principe* of Machiavelli. In her one seems to see a *réactionnaire*, who had, we know, believed in the Revolution until it evolved. In her *col-laborateur*, so to say, Chateaubriand, we may perhaps find a believer in the Concordat, though not in the giver of the Concordat. Both represent something of optimism—"the optimism of evolution, as distinguished from the optimism of revolution or (reaction or) quietism." If, in the phrase of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, "Revolution has ostracised Zeus," Zeus (with the aid of "René") has come to his own again! Naturally, the old poet was disillusioned, as was our own old poet, Tennyson, when, in the vale of years, he sang sadly of the lies that multiply themselves. But the Titan was unconquered still, to the last "lap," in 1848.

## XXIX. Le Premier Empire.

I TURN now to the poets of the First Empire.

The opening XIX. Century boasted nothing much better than rhymers. Erudition choked all passion and enthusiasm. We seem once more in the days of Callimachus and his pupils and rivals. Battiades himself could not excel in plethora of knowledge (standing in the place where it should not) François de Neufchâteau, Legouvé, Millevoye and such elegant conductors of poetry to the mouth of the Pit. But, about 1820, thanks to the efforts of Mme. de Staël and Chateaubriand, a real *revirement* took place in French verse-writing. This is now Romantic or *chevaleresque*, being the terms used by Mme. de Staël in her *Allemagne* (burned in 1810, by order of Napoleon, but published, from the MS., by Murray, in 1813). Poetry is henceforth to have no debt to pay and no gratitude to feel to the Classics, Latin and Greek. But the first adherents went further. They claimed that they broke with immemorial tradition. (They did not do so). They wished to put off all restraint, they said, as—in the language of Hugo—the poet “ne doit prendre conseil que de la nature, de “la vérité et de l’inspiration.” (Really these fierce innovators accepted most of the old rules of poetry). What canons of versification were rejected by these Protestants of Verse were superseded by strictest rhymes, *temps forts*, *temps faibles* and such severities. Boileau’s *rest of the hemistich* and *overflowing line* counsels of perfection began now to be scouted.

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Young men always know everything so much better than wiseacres dead and gone. Young men come *fresh* to the work. They are not overweighed by experience and crippled by the superfluity of naughtiness cleped Erudition. They forget readily—and who can blame them?—that it is not given to all men to know all things, no, not even to the youngest. These clever youths attacked Racine, who had been unfortunate enough, we remember, to displease Mme. de Sévigné (except when the Monarch spoke to her of him on a never-to-be-forgotten occasion). Racine and coffee she considered “fads” of a day. Racine had pleased Boileau so much that the author of the *Art poétique* had, from him and Corneille, and from deep study of them, engraved the Doctrine of the Three Unities in the lines:

Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour un seul fait accompli  
Tienne jusqu'à la fin le théâtre rempli.

These Three Unities must have appeared to these Golden Youths as absurd as the Trinity. They set themselves deliberately to break them in *their* composition. So we have now-a-days the, no doubt equally golden, adolescence, which is nothing if not *décadent*. “Emancipated” means, in France, to-day, not only “let loose finally from the *pion* and *surveillance* of the *lycée*” but also, “freed from all duty towards God and towards man” (woman still exacts an exaggerated service of hypocrisy). Dressed as decrepit men, *cerei in vitium*, young men affect, shortly after “emancipation,” poetry of the decadent school, so largely redolent of “Slang” that few can

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read it aright or profane it by comprehending its esoteric neologisms. "Decadent" poets adorn their lucubrations with "decadent" imagery, nightmares in pen and ink, portentous, preposterous. In a word, the Government-supported clubs for Undergraduates, when the "International" is hurled forth upon the midnight air and the κτίλος ἱερὸς is a hissing and a by-word, teem with "decadent" raw recruits for the army, first, and, after, for any official job that offers. From what we see to-day we can, *mutatis mutandis*, reconstitute the Young France of the closing XVIII. and opening XIX. Centuries.

## XXX. Hugo.

**Mercier** (1740—1814) had damned two of the Unities by calling them *de cadran et de salon*. He outdid Diderot's *Discours* with his *Du théâtre, ou nouvel essai sur l'art dramatique*. But the damnation of Diderot had to be shared by this reformer, who cursed bitterly but built not up. Sanballats, too, were the *romantiques*. For these, Classical tragedy was inflated, the distinction between Tragedy and Comedy absurd. Racine and his contemporaries agreed with Bossuet that Art should "embellish Nature"; Victor Hugo and the *romantiques* found "all Nature inherent in Art." Thus the same drama, on this principle, may combine—in Hugo's phrase—"le grotesque et le sublime, le terrible et le buffon." **Victor Hugo's** *Préface de Cromwell* (1827) appropriately and regicidally killed dead Racine, treated him as a "blackguard Pitt." Three years later, Hugo, like Mercier, practised what he preached; and, unlike him, succeeded. *Hernani*, then played (1830), might be called the *Five Disunities*, one for each Act. One there marches on from improbability to improbability. *Scenes*: Saragossa, a "place," a mountain castle, Aix-la-Chapelle. *Action*: The King of Spain saves his rival, Hernani (Act I.); conversely (Act II.); Hernani unites with de Silva against the King (Act III.); the King shuts himself up in Charlemagne's tomb, whence the Kaiser borrowed the death-trappings the other day; comes out Emperor; pardons everybody who has been seeking his royal life, and marries dona Sol



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to Hernani (Act. IV.); all but the King kill themselves (Act V.). The details are fine, of course, but character-sketching there is none. This, then, is the kind of thing that takes the place at this period of Boileau's Canon of the Three Unities. If the Romantic contention is true and "all that Nature comprises is contained equally in Art," then Zola, for all his Zoiluses, is right and Nature's filth must be, or may be, described *ad nauseam*, in every sense; pornography may claim to be artistic, as it certainly paints Nature. Classicism is *net*, clean-cut, formal; Romanticism is *relâché*, rough-hewn, *négligé*. There is between them something of the difference between the lady of France in January, say, when she is paying her state calls on people she sees once a year, and the same dame with an *intime*. The resemblance is small, almost *négligeable*, between these avatars of the same *Française*.

Victor Hugo's and his disciples' *romantique* success was short-lived, dying with the *Burgraves* (1843), produced before a frigid House, though the work is still read in (clerical) schools in France, for some "holy reason," no doubt, as Herodotus would subjoin. *Romantic* drama was dead, but Classicism had received a deadly blow, too. From *Cromwell*, then, by Hugo, in 1827, to Hugo's *Burgraves*, in 1843, is the chronologic tether of Romanticism, whose appearance had at least given life to the dead-and-alive literature of its epoch. By his first *Odes et ballades* (1822-1826) Hugo had caught the public ear and a little distracted it from the poet of the *Méditations*. *Orientales* (1829), *Feuilles d'Automne* (1831), *Chants*

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*du Crépuscule* (1835), *Voix intérieures* (1837), *Les Rayons et les Ombres* (1840) emphasised that effect on the public. Imagery and colouring were especially appreciated in his poetry. Between his *Hernani* and *Burgraves* had appeared his *Marion Delorme* (1831), *Le Roi s'amuse* (1832), *Lucrèce Borgia* and *Marie Tudor* (1833). *Anti-romanticism* made his entrance into the Académie "a journey as the path of heaven" for difficulty: he entered in 1841. From the *Burgraves* to the *Châtiments* (in 1852)—published in exile in Jersey—he was silent, occupied in politics. His *Contemplations* (by the melancholy ocean) came out in 1856 and, three years later, the *Légende des Siècles* (1859). In the *Marion Delorme* year he had published *Notre-Dame de Paris*, and now he broke out again into *romans*, the *Misérables* (1862), the *Travailleurs de la mer* (1866), *L'Homme qui rit* (1869). These latter can scarcely be classed as highly as *Notre-Dame*. Mixed up with them in point of time come: *William Shakespeare* (1864), *Les Chansons des Rues et des Bois* (1865). *L'Année terrible* came out in 1872, *Quatre-Vingt-Treize* in 1874, *Histoire d'un Crime* in 1877. The work of "Hugo in decay" is deliberately omitted, with much beside of this multitudinous writer of an "abounding insincerity" and "self-sufficiency." In rhythm and rhyme specially he is considered unparalleled and, generally, in poetry is at his best. Paradoxes, antitheses, and lies play a big part in his prose (the lie in verse being *ex hypothesi* impossible). He could act a lie, also, packing houses and engineering his reputation. He "wobbled" in politics between the Right and the Left. He

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was part Teuton and part Breton, born at Besançon, and lived long enough, 83 years, to write himself out and begin afresh; to stultify himself, get the stultification forgotten and re-stultify himself.

\* \* \*

This long life of Victor Hugo (1802—1885), practically co-extensive with the Century, except for the *fin de Siècle* authors, ran parallel with most of Béranger's (1780—1857) and Lamartine's (1790—1869) lives. I touch on Béranger.

## XXXI.

### Beranger and Lamartine.

**Pierre Jean de Béranger** (1780—1857) lived in a garret, as we all know from his poems, when in Paris, after his father's financial loss in 1798. In 1804, he applied successfully for help to Lucien Bonaparte. One of those versifiers, rather than poets, who flourished before the date (roughly, 1820), when the influence of Mme. de Stäel and Chateaubriand improved poetry, was Arnault (1766—1834): he found Béranger a clerkship in the Imperial University office. Pierre Jean's first songs (1815) showed him as the lyrical anti-Bourbon. He became the *chansonnier* of the working-classes, whom he moved as he willed. Fletcher of Saltoun's *mot* was again shown true in Béranger. Even printing the *chansons* was not necessary as advertisement. They were bought up unprinted. In the end, 1821, the Government interfered—500 frs. and three months. In 1825, when the award was 10,000 frs. and nine months, Hugo, Dumas and Sainte-Beuve visited him in prison. *Chansons nouvelles* appeared in 1830, in 1840 his *Life*. He still retains his popularity, and I know a *juge de paix* whose literary baggage is practically nothing but Béranger and Mme. de Sévigné. To liken him to Burns is fair to neither him nor the Scots' poet. The Frenchman—a Parisian, to boot—has the defects of his qualities (and vice versa). Flitting from subject to subject, vivacious, witty, tripping, spontaneous; gaiety on the borderland of pathos,

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laughter too ready to let satire lurk and canker—something such is he, and not much other than the above is his poetic name. The *chanson* on the ground of the politician is poaching paramount. The *chanson* trenching on the *ode* is innovation. Prison and popularity went hand in hand, and Béranger could never long be sad or bear a grudge, one would say. He had a tremendous name as a *chansonnier*, and deserved it. ✓

And now I come to a man who, by one or other of his various sides of character, resembles, in turn, Chateaubriand, Sir Walter Scott (so superior, according to W. E. Henley, to Victor Hugo in his *romans*) and E. A. Poe. This man's works are certainly losing their hold on France, as a whole, but some choice spirits still swear by him. \*  
He began with his best, or, as his countrymen say, he "started with having his swan-song." As a historian, he was as untrustworthy as, say, J. A. Froude, but *plus* poetry in historic prose. **Alphonse de Lamartine**, then, lived some 79 years (1790—1869), and did not begin to flourish precociously. After studying in such quiet as those Revolutionary times allowed, he was already 30 when he surpassed his own future—in Miltonic phrase—with *Méditations poétiques* (1820). The noise these made had hardly ceased when he printed more—*Nouvelles Méditations* (1823) and *Harmonies poétiques* (1829), on which last he was elected unanimously to the Académie. His poetic status thus fixed, de Lamartine must needs make a tour in Greece, Syria, and specially Palestine, like Chateaubriand, whom he resembled in his *âme d'élite*. By 1833, however, his opinions in politics were changed suddenly; he was député now, as well as poet,

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and published *Jocelyn* (1836), *Chute d'un ange* (1838), *Recueils poétiques* (1839), *Histoire des Girondins* (1847). "Power showed the man" in 1848, and that man retired right rapidly. Again, like Chateaubriand, or like Sir Walter, the poet in his last years was sad enough, giving with both hands, obliged to put his pen at the publishers' service. Parliament voted de Lamartine a moderate pension, and the Paris town council gave him a *chalet* in the Bois de Boulogne. Among interesting things in his career is his marriage with Marianne Birch, an Englishwoman who shared his aspirations. Another event of importance is his publishing the *Histoire des Girondins*: by the Conservatives considered a cause, or the cause, of the 1848 Revolution. Really, the *Histoire* is only another illustration of poetic and prophetic temperaments being, apparently, closely allied. Jean Jacques' reference to the age of Revolutions is a case in point. We may choose to consider that the old Scriptural Prophets, e.g., Isaiah, wrote or had written their prophecies in verse rather than in prose because they lived in the poetic period, when all was poetry and parable, and a straight thought could not be told in a straight, off-hand manner. This is, however, only a partly correct explanation, probably. The nervous conditions of poet and prophet are, we may imagine, largely the same, and the province of the seer readily passes over into that of the singer. So the *Girondins'* historian in no way caused the Revolution. He had, one can allow, read the stars better than his fellow-politicians, had seen into the future far as human eye could see—at the time. He hated the double-dealing of the



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Orleanists, insisted on an appeal to the people, was Minister of Foreign Affairs in the new Republic, suppressed the 15 May outbreak, but had disappeared from politics before Louis Napoléon began his reign (1). Nothing but academical discussions with friends on the events of the day troubled his literary repose any more, a repose which worked hard enough to publish the *Confidences*, *Raphaël*, *Geneviève*, *Tailleur de Pierres de St. Point*, *Histoire de la Restauration*, *Collections*, *Discours divers*, *Entretiens familiers*. He lives by his *Méditations*, chiefly. The *Lac* is ever in favour in France. What he wrote in the first heat, as it were, is best, and this he wrote early, before he was 30. Moved himself, he can move his reader. Imagination and harmony have in him at this period a blended charm that is contagious. He is a poet in everything he touches—in History, in practical politics. Accuracy, in the one, is sacrificed to poetry, and so is success—enduring success—in the other. In corrections there are in *foison*, and obscurities, in de Lamartine's songs. These caress the ear, like E. A. Poe's verse, musically and melancholically, and the rapt hearing doth dispense with sense (2). A first reading is perfect, a second fatal. The overture is all delight, its repetition palls upon us—especially if we

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(1) "La poésie était revenue en France avec la liberté" is a phrase of de Lamartine, of which the Greeks—whom he visited—make great capital, and which they apply to their own case. The Armenians, also, still set store by the author of *Méditations*, as I learned in Stamboul.

(2) "A voce più ch' al ver drizzan li volti" (Dante, *Purg.* xxvi., v. 121) may be pressed into the service of this contention, viz. : that Poetry speaks more to the ear than to cold appreciation of Truth. Tasso would have it that "nella poesia il diletto è niezzo e non fine." de Lamartine's is "L'art c'est le cœur."

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are ill-advised enough to ask for a sense that is not there. Music is the soul of the piece, sense but its clogging body. Sense, pressed home, is even "the body of its death." But surely, in de Lamartine, as in Poe, it were better, sweeter, to lull us with the musical sounds, and let the sense take care of itself. There is enough sense to pass muster in a sympathetic reading. Music and melody and rhythm and rhyme and a subtle melancholy make up largely for any lack of sense. Poe's own words in his address *On the Poetic Principle* have always seemed to me true : they are particularly pertinent to Poe himself and to de Lamartine : " And thus there can be little doubt that " in the union of Poetry and Music in its popular sense " we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. . . . Unless incidentally, it [the Poetry " of words] has no concern whatever either with Duty " or with Truth." Before, the Poet of Music has just said : " It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most " nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired " by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of " supernal Beauty. It *may* be, indeed, that here this " sublime end is, now and then, attained *in fact*. We " are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that " from an earthly harp are stricken notes which *cannot* " have been unfamiliar to the angels." Certainly, to decline the aid of Music is, to say the least, unwise. Poe and de Lamartine knew this, and made the most of the knowledge by translating this knowledge into "the music of wonderful melodies." And of these some are still with us in memory, but most have fallen on sleep. Not so with Swinburne's rhythmic music,

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his earlier and, to most (there is no doubt), his best. This haunts us by day and by night—the sensuous, luscious music in verse, of which the meaning is what it may be. It is Swinburne, the “drunk with Music,” as Barukh Spinoza was “drunk with God,” not Swinburne the looker-forward to a “democratic millennium,” “with Mazzini for its John the Baptist,” that we remember, with lilting fragments of him on our tongue, with gratitude for showing us “supernal beauty” done into perfect melody with his *Proserpine*, too exquisite to be desecrated by being rendered into any language, living or dead.

## XXXII. "Arcades Ambo."

(*Verg: Ecl: vii, 4.*)

AFTER de Lamartine come two of his followers, the two Alfreds, de Musset and de Vigny.

**Alfred de Musset** (1810-1857) wrote, as has been well said, to a master in his own art when he indited the *Lettre à Lamartine*. Victor Hugo's *Cénacle*, "Holy" of Holies" of the then Romanticism, received him on his publishing his *Contes d'Espagne et d'Italie*. His works generally divide themselves, as to time and character, by the fatal Italian trip which he took with George Sand (1804-1876). If he was Alfred before, fascinating and a spoilt child, splendid and brilliant, he was the *René* of Chateaubriand, after that visit to Venice, in that winter of content, short-lived. *Les Poésies diverses* (1831) followed the fiasco (Odéon 1830) of *La Nuit Vénitienne* (*infaustum nomen!*), and in 1832 came out the *Spectacle dans un fauteuil*: with it was *Namouna*. The *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in 1833, published his *André del Sarto* and *Caprices de Marianne* ("not a woman, but woman"). *Rolla* has fallen short of its promise of life. Then comes the journey of *Elle et Lui* (her version), 1859, or of *Lui et Elle* (his brother's version, same year). In the former account Alfred had had a fever, which made him think that his loving Aurore was faithless; in the Gospel according to Paul (de Musset) there was real infidelity on the lady's part, and no fever or delirium in the gentleman. Tradition, as apart from Gospel, has it

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that Alfred came back, broken in health and spirits, alone, in April, and that the "baronne" wrote romances of one who was or was not Alfred, and *was* named Laurent (Jacques). Certain have hinted that the experience served her as material, and spurred her on to literary activity. We have the similar case to-day of Gabriele d'Annunzio and Eleanore Duse, if what is told, or even a tithe of what is told, is true. In any case, winnowing fact from fiction is a game not worth the candle. The author of *Il Fuoco*, we are told, wrote up (or down) the experiences which The Duse had given him; and the author of *Elle et Lui* busied herself in writing of one who made her write well, and whose acquaintance was the cause of her having such good "copy." It is not now thought, in England, "good form" to subject a friendly lady's intense passion for oneself to the scalpel of "paying" romances' introspective dissection. I cannot believe that, in the France of the Thirties, even a "baronne" gained in the eyes of society by vivisectioning the feelings, so to say, and photographing in words the soul-writhings of *un enfant du siècle*. That *enfant's* "confession" came out in 1836. It shows that the iron had entered even into the soul. Where now the old "girdings"? Where now the *paradoxes voulus*? Where now the young Mohawk? All is correct and melancholy and admirable and pathologic. Alcohol added an artful aid, and to this date—at least, to 1852—we can trace back the still popular pun between "s'absenter" and "s'absinther." Sainte Beuve records de Musset's tipsy attendance at the Académie, to which he was with difficulty elected in 1852; but soon "il s'absentait

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"trop." He died, of heart, on May 1st, 1857. I turn to his verse. And first of an anonymous critic (*Quarterly Review*, July, 1900). "It is never possible "to convince a foreigner that Byron is often not even "correct as a writer of verse. . . . How many English- "men know quite how bad, as verse, is the verse of the "French Byron, as he has been called, Alfred de "Musset, and quite why it is bad? And as Byron's "best verse, even more than Musset's, is worldly "verse, it is still more difficult to detect a failure in "accent, in that finer part of what Byron calls 'the "'poetry of speech.'" George Sand made Alfred de Musset sincere, even as Byron was sincere. "He "[Byron] is fundamentally sincere, which is the root "of greatness": he defines History as "the Devil's "Scripture," Rome as "the Niobé of nations." In passion following Byron, de Musset has been, even by British critics, placed before him for reality, if not for "finish" and exquisite art. De Musset, after his disillusion, is classical—severely classical. And this, as Goethe saw, Byron had *plus* "comic elegance." Byron was, he says himself, "*ennuyé* at nineteen"; the *désespérance* of Alfred was given to the world in 1836, and the world comprehended it not. Byron was rhetorical; de Musset deliberately rejected rhetoric's developments, trusting rather to the enthymeme. He said you must read between the true poet's lines two or three times what the bard says: the reader is to serve up the *vers remarquable* to himself with his own sauces. Admirable are his *Espoir en Dieu*, *la Nuit de Mai*, *la Nuit d'Octobre*, *l'Ode à la Malibran*. The first of these has, I shrewdly suspect, kept the kernel



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of Belief in a Professor of Anatomy I know in France, whose “pride of intellectuality” would, but for the *Espoir*, have flouted Religion. Dead well over a half-century, de Musset has still a select few who love his memory and his poetry. In this, as in his exquisite prose, *Contes et nouvelles*, and *Comédies et proverbes*, he resembles E. A. Poe. (1) There remaineth a remnant which worships. The high-water mark of lyrical excellence is reached in the *Nuits*. Sainte-Beuve prefers two of them to the *Penseroso*. His “small glass” of lyricism is often perfect, and his little volumes of plays and stories are excellent almost in inverse proportion to their size and number. Thus, it has come about that of these three—de Lamartine, Victor Hugo, and de Vigny—who have all written more than de Musset, not one has as good friends, perhaps, as the smallest writer in point of bulk. This last has out-and-out partisans. These give as the reason of the faith that is in them that the de Musset of the *Poésies nouvelles* is of all modern poets the most candid, eloquent (in the French sense), sober as a metrist, and “correct.” For “correctness” he is comparable to Boileau himself, whom he has cursed bitterly, and to La Fontaine. Of de Musset is true, on occasion, what has been said of Byron—again, of Byron!

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(1) *Mimi Pinson* is a *conte*; so is *Le Merle Blanc*: both are still favourites—in France, at least. In the *Nouvelles* we are said to find himself, under the name Valentin (*Deux Maîtresses*). To the *Comédies* belong the important *André del Sarto*, *Lorenzaccio*, *On ne badine pas avec l'Amour*. His *proverbes*, by their very titles, make us think of that married misogynist and vegetarian Fabian, George Bernard Shaw: e.g.,

*Il ne faut jurer de rien,  
On ne saurait penser à tout.*

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“What is not there is precisely the magic which “seems to make poetry its finer self, the perfume of “the flower, that by which the flower is remembered, “after its petals have dropped or withered.”

As promised above, I pass on to Alfred de Vigny, leaving for a more convenient season Mme. George Sand, whose “call” it might well be here.

**Alfred de Vigny** (1797-1863) combined Royalist soldiering and verse, of which latter the first saw the light in 1822, the year of *Odes et Ballades* (Victor Hugo’s challenge to de Lamartine). De Vigny’s *début* was an aping of André Chénier. Soon a *revirement*—and the French dearly love a *revirement*—made the new poet philosophic and moral in the guise of dramatist or epic writer. All his aristocratic elegance could not warm his work ; perhaps he was deliberately cold—he certainly had no wish to please others or himself, and in this double negation was successful. He had a few grand views, which possessed him and enforce one’s thought, if one would enter into his mind. Rich in ideas, he is poor, comparatively, in work done, in poetic execution. Émile Faguet asks “What, with “all his thought, has de Vigny done commensurately?” He is, in this respect, the converse of Hugo, whose splendour of diction hides a deep-set want of towering thought. All this effort of de Vigny shows originality, at least, in the result, if there is no very alarming literary output to his credit. ὀλίγον τε φίλον τε might be his Homeric formula: “his work is Zoar, a “little thing, but his own.” As a Romanticist, he rouses Sainte Beuve’s scorn: he went “to his ivory “tower before the heat of the day,” according to the

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author of *Portraits* and *Nouveaux Lundis*. And such shelter from perfervid partisanship suited well such a cold and undemonstrative noble as our comte. Sometimes, however, as in the *Servitude et Grandeur Militaires*, he forgot to be his own bitter and cold and melancholy self.

Siendo el remedio olvidar,  
Se me olvidaba el remedio.

But de Vigny, on this occasion, forgot himself and his pose (and part-reality) of pessimism, and this self-forgetting was the remedy against himself. This, his self-stultification, is a type of the man. He was uncertain. He defined Art as the truth chosen by the artist, but this at once makes the Art-standard subjective. And with subjectivity enter in multiplicity and all types of confusion. We picture the cold, grand noble in his sadness and thoughts of the lost Mme. Dorval, orb'd in his isolation, hating a universe that reck'd nought of him. The French, indeed, in a manner disowned him and de Musset; of both "the intellectual fatherland," according to Gautier, was England. (Mme. de Vigny was *née* Miss Lydia Bunbury). *Eloa* (1824), *Poèmes antiques et modernes* (1826), *Cinq Mars* (1826), *Othello* translated (1829), *La Maréchale d'Ancre* (1830), *Stello* (1832), *Chatterton* (1835), are the chief works he printed in his life-time. Some of his best writing, e.g., *Destinées*, was published after his death. One of his worst efforts was apparently vented on the *Académie*, which elected him in 1845. On the whole, one rather gathers that the comte was insufferably "superior," and his *Chatterton*, at least, is guilty of bad

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taste, to our insular mind, besides saddling the Bristol poet with such atrocities as *deslavatie*, *acrool*, *mynd-bruck*—cacophonous, if Chattertonian. His "Mistress Kitty," in the same, also, is weakly drawn and fairly colourless: the sentiment seems thin. But for his countrymen by birth (not "by intellectuality") the *Chatterton* has a charm of its own, partly (perhaps) because it is thought severe on us British, the compatriots intellectual, from whom he took to wife the strange woman, as did Lamartine. He has no statue yet in Paris, so full of statues.

## XXXIII.

### George Sand and Two Preachers.

AFTER verse, prose—prose idyll and love of nature, an inheritance of J. J. Rousseau, say some.

Lucile Aurore Dupin, who called herself Armandine or Amantine, whose *nom de guerre* was **George Sand**, and who claimed to be “baronne” Dudevant, was the grand-daughter of Dupin de Francueil, famous in the Rousseau circle, and of Mme. Dupin (*en premières nocés*, Ctesse. de Horn). (Her mother, who did not count for much, was a *modiste*). Mme. Dupin’s death left her a small heiress, and she married a man who had “no name,” but some money, M. Dudevant—a *mariage de convenance*. He was devoted to sport and she to Platonic friendships until they separated, after nine years, she to Bohemian life in Paris and men’s clothes, he to enjoy her money, until a legal separation gave it back to her. Her poetic “voyage” with de Musset has been described in brief; her musical tour (*Hiver à Majorque*) with Chopin—behold, it is written in the life of that virtuoso. The beginning of this acquaintance was in 1836, and it lasted for seven years, when Aurore “vivisected and stuffed” *Prince Carol* (*Lucrezia Floriani* describes the Lorraine Pole) “and added” him “to her collection of heroes “for novels.” So Liszt, who introduced the “*Prince*” to the “*baronne*.” Her *Histoire de ma Vie* gives her version, as her *Elle et Lui* gives her account of herself and de Musset. Elsewhere she depicts Lamennais,

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that Breton of Bretons, and in some ways a prototype of Ernest Renan, of the same nationality. Her Lamennais experiences belong to her second decade of great acquaintances. About 1848 she began to be sensible, continuing such and at Nohant (Indre) for over twenty-five years. *Romantic* at first in her style, when she lauded the *femme incomprise*, she became tinged by her philosophic friends; later, she was rustic and spontaneous, to taper off into something more strained and less natural. She wrote poetry, too, and letters to Flaubert and others. Indeed, her chief crime, artistically speaking, is over-writing. Sentimental *romans* are *Indiana*, *Lélia*, *Valentine*; social, *Consuelo*; rustic, *la mare au diable*, *la petite Fadette*, *François le Champi*. The following is her literary character in two or three words: "imagination romanesque, psychologie intelligente et fine." There were brave men before Agamemnon, and "rustic" poetry and prose before George Sand. Among the later Roman poets, from Statius, we seem to trace in its development an approximation to modern feeling for Nature. The author of the *Thebais* gives us, in Vopiscus' villa, glimmering leaves, gleaming water, murmuring waterfalls. Wordsworth is anticipated by some of Ausonius—his *Moselle* and *Roses*. Sand is a late but—in her way—a good exponent of rustic scenery. Her having been such, even in a phase of her *multicolore* life, redounds to her credit. Her artistic sin is diffuseness.

Her description of *Félicité de Lamennais* has been referred to, and brings me naturally to speak of that



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philosopher and theologian. His *gamut* is well-known : priest, apologist of the theocratic principle, Catholic Liberal and fiery apostle of revolutionary doctrines. Between those extremities marked by the *Essai sur l'indifférence en matière de religion* and *Paroles d'un croyant* there is almost the totality of a human life. The first dates from 1818, when Lamennais was just ordained priest at thirty-four. The success of the *Essai* has been likened to that of that other Breton's *Génie du Christianisme*. (Lamennais' mother was of Irish extraction). A previous venture into literature, *Réflexions sur l'État de l'Église* (1808) had been suppressed by the Government. In collaboration with his eldest brother, a priest, he wrote the *Tradition de l'Église sur l'Institution des Évêques* (1814). In London during the Hundred Days, he returned and was ordained at Vannes, 1815. One seems to see this philosopher, with trouble of mind before and harassed soul after his ordination, in that old-fashioned town of Vannes—famous for Jules Simon's school, for its strip of sea and shady promenade, for its Royalist traditions,—as in an environment of the most unsuitable. Even Tréguier as a framework for Ernest Renan is not much more wrong æsthetically, one seems to think. “Down “with private judgment” is the burden of his *Essai*. There he shows the falsity of atheism, of deism, of Protestantism. Then comes his *Défense de l'Essai*, against Free Thought, against antipapal Gallicans, against Ultramontanes. Pure theocracy ideas now became blended in his thoughts with new dreams of liberty (*Progrès de la Révolution*, 1829). After the

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1830 revolution, he, Lacordaire and Montalembert founded *L'Avenir* and, after it was stopped in 1831, set out for Rome (*affaires de Rome*, 1836). *Paroles d'un Croyant* (1834) mark a new stage in the disillusioned Breton, viz., a start of mystic religion with a new Heaven and a new Earth, a new Society Paradisiacal, the working out of perfect freedom through the service of God, Who is Love. Sainte-Beuve says even the printers' devils trembled with emotion in reading these Apocalyptic prophesyings. The Church anathematised it. The People was with the author apostolic: thus, we have *Le livre du peuple*, *Du passé et de l'avenir du peuple* and *Une Voix de prison*, and, in fact, he was for one year in Sainte Pélagie prison. The 1848 revolution saw him as brave as ever, but broken by evil days and loss of friends and shattered health. Austere, excessive, passionately truthful, born to suffer, he lies in Père-la-Chaise, among the poor. But his grave! No man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.

**Jean Baptiste Henri Lacordaire** (1802—1861) was, we have seen, a *collaborateur* of Lamennais in the establishment and carrying on of *l'Avenir* newspaper, High Church and Radical. Here, the two opposed the appointment by Louis Philippe of two bishops, and were summoned, but acquitted. The paper lasted only thirteen months. A school opened by Montalembert and Lacordaire, ordained priest in 1827, was closed. It would be the same to-day, if an unauthorised clergyman started a school. To-day, too, the highest degree, *agrégation*, cannot be held by a priest. To-day, also, the best Assyriologist, Father Schiel, was rejected for

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the chair of Assyriology in favour of a Protestant "understudy." To-day, once more, the idea is to throttle all clerical teaching establishments in favour of the lay. Lay nurses are to-day being everywhere substituted for *religieuses*—that is, ladies who make the Government pay them for their services substituted for ladies who do everything for a mere pittance or even for nothing. All religion and all religiosity apart, the economic result of such governmental conduct is plain to all who have eyes to see and who buy in the best and cheapest market, whether that be Jew, Gentile, Turk, Heretic or Infidel. In 1848 Lacordaire "accepted the Republic" of that time—i.e., was what would now be called a *Rallié*. After his famous Conferences—as well attended as, say, Father Bernard Vaughan's in these latter days—he was allowed to direct the Dominican School of Sorèze (Tarn). (He had entered the Dominican Order in 1839. Father Burke of Tallaght, Dublin, was of the same Order and a marvellous speaker.) Besides his *Conférences*, we have of him three funeral orations, worthy of Bossuet in their *genre*. And we remark that his country was Recey sur Ource (Côte d'Or), while Dijon gave birth to Bossuet and St. Bernard : (of this Saint, again, Bossuet pronounced a panegyric). Like Socrates before Alcibiades, Lacordaire before his hearers was *romantique*, and spoke of familiar or trivial objects in the very midst of boldest images or flights of eloquence (not that Socrates would stoop to being eloquent). He had to be heard, not read. Big men of the pulpit there have been since in France, but they do not figure in accounts of preaching, as this

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Dominican has apparently swamped all since his time (and all predecessors as far back as Mascaron, 1703).

[St. Bernard, just mentioned above, was the adversary of Abélard, and one had to go back to the time of Pierre Abélard (of Nantes and Héloïse)—that is, to the XI. and XII. Centuries—to get an audience like Lacordaire's.]

## XXXIV.

### Cousin, Simon, Sainte-Beuve.

**Victor Cousin** (1792-1867) *inter alia* edited Abélard and wrote *études* on those courtly Héloïses, Mesdames de Longueville, de Chevreuse et de Sablé. He is the greatest eclectic philosopher of modern times. "What is Truth?" asked Pontius Pilatus, whom nobody has answered up to date. Eclectics are always essaying a reply. It is a far cry from Panoetius and Posidonius to the XIX. Century, from Carneades and Philo of Larissa to "M. le suppléant de Royer-Collard à la "Sorbonne." The Sophists of the V. Century B.C. were eclectic, and Plato and Aristotle were themselves tarnished with some eclecticism. So was Cicero. So was, largely, Seneca. Weak eclecticism was Neo-Platonic (or Platonic Stoic) and Neo-Pythagorean. Philo's was a new kind. Lastly, for Greece, we have Neo-Platonism (proper). Early Christians were eclectic, e.g., Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Through Eckhardt, Bruno and Campanella we arrive at eclectic Leibniz, who hunted after a common basis for philosophy. Cousin was introduced to Scotch tenets through Royer-Collard and to Locke and Condillac through Maine de Biran. His selection system was sketched by means of his psychological analysis. His school waxed and prospered, with such pupils as Jouffroy and B. Saint-Hilaire. Even British critics of Cousin allow that he showed more brilliancy than his originals—the Scots. Had only the French said so,

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it would only be *de règle*. During his second visit to Germany, to learn their philosophy more thoroughly, he was imprisoned on suspicion of Carbonarism, perhaps because "bons cousins" is the style and title of the initiated. Our *bon* Cousin made use of captivity in Berlin to learn more Hegel. This was in 1824-1825. Before his imprisonment, he had been removed from his Chair, which he later re-occupied. Like most Frenchmen, he was lucid and had a fine style; he made History and Philosophy mutually helpful. When, after the revolution of 1830, Guizot, his friend, was made chief of the government, Cousin was named on the Public Instruction Council and, later, Director of the École Normale. In 1840 he was Minister of Public Instruction. After favouring the 1848 revolution and Cavaignac's government, he retired from public life during the next year, dying in 1867. In 1827, 1841, 1840-1841, he published works on his favourite History of Philosophy, whether pure or modern or moral. Kant and the women of the XVII. Century occupied him in 1842, 1853, while in 1854 came out his famous *Du Vrai, du Beau et du Bien*, which has run through many editions. There is—among many others—a work on him (1887) by Jules Simon, whom I shall now discuss with the utmost brevity due.

**Jules Simon** (1814-1896) succeeded Victor Cousin, his master, as lecturer on philosophy at the Sorbonne, 1839; was minister of Public Instruction in the National Defence Government, as was Cousin in 1840, but was forced by the clericals to resign in 1873, when



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he began to lead the Left. He took up the direction of the *Siècle* paper in 1874, and was minister of the Interior and chief of the Government in 1876. But MacMahon and the Right made him resign. Advancing years so cooled his republicanism that he opposed Jules Ferry's religious orders expulsion bill. In 1880 he was elected member of the Supreme Educational Council by the Académie. Descartes, Bossuet, Malebranche and Antoine Arnauld were edited by him. On the whole of his works reason would not that I write at length. Below are a few, chronicled for reference and so that they will perhaps make a reader perforce think of John Stuart Mill, politician, philosopher, economic writer. *Indices et portraits*, 1893, his last work, *Histoire de l'École d'Alexandrie* (1844-45), *La Liberté, La Liberté de conscience* (1859), *La Religion Naturelle* (1856), *L'Ouvrière* (1863), *L'École* (1864), *Le Travail* (1866), *La Politique radicale* (1868), *Souvenirs du 4 Septembre* (1874), *Le Gouvernement de M. Thiers* (1878), *Dieu, Patrie, Liberté* (1883), *Une Académie sous le Directoire* (1885), *Mémoires des autres* (1889), and Studies on Thiers, Guizot, Rémusat, Mignet, Michelet, Henri Martin, Victor Cousin, Caro, Reybaud, Chevalier and F. de Coulanges. Obviously, to arrive at a fairly correct estimate of any such man, endless *data* are demanded. Obviously, too, such, in their fulness, cannot be given, as a rule. Among such *data* are, it would seem, a knowledge of the environment of the person treated of and acquaintance, as deep as may be, of their character. Villemain (1790-

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1867) is the chief preacher of the first *desideratum*; Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869), of the second. If, as in the case of a French Cardinal born *en deuxièmes nocés*, the character even of the first husband shows in the child of the second male partner, the complexity of the problem, which critics such as the above set themselves to resolve, becomes infinite. Sainte-Beuve's monographs study individual dispositions *au vif*, and are quite exceptionally interesting.

In **Sainte-Beuve**, again, we find British blood. His mother was daughter of a Boulogne sailor's English wife. This fact has been held to explain in part his special bent for our literature, his special *penchant* for our poetry. A medical student in 1824, he was invited by an old professor of the Collège Charlemagne to collaborate on his new venture, the *Globe*, blessed by Goethe. His short articles on this paper, where Jouffroy, Rémusat, Ampère and Mérimée also wrote, are now known as his *Premiers Lundis*. His eulogy of Hugo's *Odes et ballades* made that bard introduce him into the *cénacle* and turn him into a Romanticist. He published his *Tableau de la Poésie française au XVI. siècle* (1828) partly to uphold Romanticism. In 1829 and 1830 his *Joseph Delorme* and *Consolations* came out, as well as his first *Causerie*, or critique on French literature. Saint-Simoniens and Lamennais next occupy him: his one novel, *Volupté*, belongs to 1834. He breaks with Lamennais' intimacy in 1836 and begins lecturing on Port Royal, at Lausanne, in 1837. In Switzerland he wrote his last poetry, *Pensées d'Août*. Here he seems to resemble

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our Wordsworth and the "Lakists," or François Coppée, just dead, in his deliberate simplicity, as a protest against rhetorical verse. God forbid, of course, that I should wish however distantly to hint that Sainte-Beuve, in his most *perdues* of *heures*, could stoop to anything like *Peter Bell*. His *August Thoughts* have nobody at the pony's tail, patting it where or when she knows not, nobody telling Johnny never to mind the Doctor. Besides, luckily *Pensées d'Août* were not over-successful. Sainte Beuve's Italian journey, he says himself, heralds his changed criticism. He is now the "naturalist of minds," keeper of the Mazarin Library and writing at his ease, probably in the manner our Winston Churchill advocates, for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, once more. Election to the Académie (to his mother's delight), professing French literature at Liège, publishing *Chateaubriand et son groupe littéraire sous l'Empire* took up much of his time till 1849. *Causeries* and *Nouveaux Lundis* took twelve hours a day for many years. He was indifferent to governments, Napoleonic or other, but Collège de France students were not indifferent to his indifference. And that because they were students. For this reason they *conspuent*, they cry. So the hireling flies because he is an hireling. Sainte-Beuve's criticism of Virgil did not suffer, as it was published afterwards (*Étude sur Virgile*). Also, the greatest critic of modern times has no more need for boys to praise him than had, say, Aristarchus of a panegyric by Ptolemy Physcon. He of Samothrace wrote some 800 works, we read, and he of Boulogne-sur-mer was not chary of using his pen for

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some eight hours a day. The modern has entered in into the very heart and reins, as it were and as the Psalmist graphically puts it. In banal phrase, "he educes the interest." He knew men and things. He knew in the fulness of the term "know." *Incorruptus judex*, he sits on the critical woolsack and marks a period, a consulship of Charles-Augustin, that is well-recognised in European history of men and letters. For he studies the men and their letters and their environment and the angles, under which they should, singly and together, be "envisaged." Sainte-Beuve has been likened to Montaigne, who may, perhaps, and in his turn, be likened to our own Lord Rosebery for knowledge and indolence. In the older, as in the younger, Frenchman we have many-sidedness and inconclusiveness, a dainty delicacy in both and, in the second, the precision of "a very subtil man." In Sainte-Beuve insight, sympathy, detailed knowledge work wonders. Men were to him an open book, and that not the book of a sedentary scholar. Among his works are: *Tableau historique et critique de la poésie française et du théâtre français au XVI. Siècle*, *poésies complètes*, *Volupté*, *Port-Royal*, *Critiques et portraits littéraires*, *portraits contemporains*, *portraits*, *portraits de femmes*, *les cahiers*, *chroniques parisiennes*, *lettres à la Princesse*, *étude sur Virgile*, *le général Jomini*, *Monsieur de Talleyrand*; *P. J. Proudhon, sa Vie et sa correspondance*; *correspondance de C. A. Sainte-Beuve*. Closing now this briefest reference to a great man, I cannot, perhaps, do better than quote two sentences on what was that man's chief achievement in the eyes of

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such as live after him, viz., his application of evolution to literature. "There is no order of phenomena which "is not conditioned by its environment, which does not "depend on circumstances outside itself; and of this "great rule poetry is a signal example. The greatness "or the littleness of the poetry of any given period "depends to some extent on the faculties of the poets "themselves; but to some extent also, and far more "than was once thought, it depends on the social conditions into which the poets have been born: and "poetry being thus connected with social history, the "criticism of it, within certain limits, is a portion of "the science of sociology." In the above, generalise by reading *literature* and *littérateurs* for *poetry* and *poets*, respectively, and we have that evolution which Villemain and Sainte-Beuve and their school of thought applied with such excellent effects.



## XXXV.

### A Quartette of Historians.

ALMOST a one-book man, **Alexis Charles Henri Cherel de Tocqueville** (1805—1859) did the proper things—toured in Italy, visited England and married an Englishwoman. He was, also—but on that one can express no opinion of virtue or vice—the darling of the Whigs for a time. He did not favour the Socialists nor extreme Republicans nor yet Louis Napoléon. Député in 1839, he was, ten years later, Minister of Foreign Affairs. After the *coup d'état*, he was back at his Norman seat, whence he took his name. This “one-book” man wrote not only his book *par excellence*—*De la Démocratie en Amérique* (1835)—but also *L'Ancien régime et la Révolution* (1856) and a previous work on the reign of Louis XV. (1846-1850). His *Œuvres et Correspondance inédites* were published, 1860, by de Beaumont, with a biography. We have his *Souvenirs* and his *Conversations and Correspondence* with Nassau Senior. His *Démocratie* has been considered by some a continuation of Montesquieu's work and the biggest political writing of its time. By all it has been praised, while the *Ancien régime* has been generally found wanting. The *Démocratie* shows accuracy, clever ‘boiling down,’ a fine style. His acceptance of the Government's offer to send him to America to report on penitentiaries was the occasion of his making himself a great name in Political Philosophy and its history.



## A QUARTETTE OF HISTORIANS.

Before passing to the Historians of the XIX Century, perhaps it would be as well to see what the French understood by the requisites of a historian. Villemain, the historian of French literature *à la Faculté des lettres* for 10 years, explained these requisites in 1826. Omitting Lucian, François Villemain comes to Machiavelli, de Thou and Bossuet, but finds none of their styles suitable to his own epoch. Machiavelli writes of Florence as of Ancient Rome; de Thou was impartial and calm and just; Bossuet marshals before his episcopal throne the human races of the past. The historian should be truthful, according to Villemain, should make live again men and manners (as the author of graphic *Salammbô*, let us say). His historian should love humanity and freedom, not be colourless in religion, politics, country. The XVIII. century historians are often, for him, wanting. Daniel is servile and fanatical; Rapin de Thoiras is a *savant*, but cold and diffuse.

I come now to **Guizot** (1787—1874). François Pierre Guillaume Guizot was *chargé de cours* at the Sorbonne and taught history. His system was largely the reducing in scale of battles and treaties, so as to give larger play to political institutions. His *Cours d'histoire moderne* is of this *genre*, and so far good, though his style and his "correction" have been criticised unfavourably. But his reputation was now established. Before, he had published his *Nouveau dictionnaire des synonymes* (1809), an essay on the fine arts (1811), a translation of Gibbon (1812). This last must have been easy, as Gibbon himself had thought

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seriously of writing in French originally. With friends, he had published *Mémoires relatifs à l'histoire de France jusqu'au xiième Siècle* and *Mémoires relatifs à la Révolution d'Angleterre*; he began his "English Revolution," and edited in French Shakespeare and Hallam. We have nothing to do with "Pam's" opinion of him, of his "Spanish Marriages," of his being *au pouvoir* in 1847 and until Louis Philippe's "graft" government fell in 1848. He only interests us again after the *coup d'état* of 1851, when he returned *à ses chères études*, *Monk*, *Chute de la République (anglaise)*, *Corneille et son temps*, "*Shakspeare*," *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps*, *Mélanges* (1868), *Mélanges* (1869), *Washington* (1839—1840). His last work, French history *racontée à mes petits-enfants*, has all his old "beauté austère," plus an increased power of writing well. For learning his craft as he went on, Guizot has been likened to Sainte-Beuve. Of course, his antagonist in politics and his brother-in-arms, as far as literature goes, Thiers (1797—1877), must have a line here. In politics, these men were not separated: in letters, the least political mind naturally looks at the two together.

**Louis Adolphe Thiers**, historian, politician, president of the French Republic (1797—1877), is another instance of heredity, as his mother was of the Chénier family. He knew Mignet (1796—1884), when a law student at Aix, and he became his most intimate friend. With Mignet, Thiers went to Paris, on being "called to the Bar." Getting on to the *Constitutionnel*, through Lafitte, he had the *entrée* in Opposition circles

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and made the acquaintance of Talleyrand and Casimir Périer, while he was engaged with his *Histoire de la Révolution française*, untrustworthy and inaccurate. His new venture, the *National*, was interdicted, and, in return, helped to exile Charles X. He returned to French History (*Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire*, 1845—1860), his most ambitious and biggest literary achievement, in fact—rhetorical, brilliant, inaccurate, unjust. After 1851, he was busy with history for eight years at a stretch. His *French Revolution* has gone through endless editions, owing its popularity to the spirit in which Thiers has conceived it, viz.: impartiality, or what he considered to be such; on no Jacobin system, with no attempt on his part to palliate crime. Thiers and Guizot's history is what the French call "régénérée. These two rivals resemble Gladstone and Disraeli, each, when in office, writing little, and much when out of the Cabinet for the time being. Thiers' experience was something extraordinary, and is shown to be such in some of his best historical work.

Nothing can be better than what was (traditionally) said of a brother-historian of Thiers, **Michelet** (1798—1874), the poet of history, as against its dramatist, Thierry (1795—1856). *Documenté* work seemed an eternity to Michelet, who, however, still "consulted" occasionally the archives of his imagination." Michelet has characterised historical science in the XIX. Century; what is of Thierry is narration;

Guizot's is analysis;

Michelet's is resurrection.

This is good, but not original. We remember how P.

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Corneille and Racine were described, and that  
Æschylus' drama painted men as gods ;  
Sophocles' drama painted men as they should be ;  
Euripides' drama painted men as they are.

In the above historian-politicians, who are only samples of several belonging to this Louis-Philippe period, we find neither very remarkable politics nor quite excellent history. The idea, current among politicians, that they can burn the candle at both ends, is not necessarily true. They cannot be prodigies as governmentalists and literary phenomena as *homines umbratiles*—in the shades of Opposition. The average man cannot make history and write it well. Gladstone's Homer is all wrong, Disraeli's Lord Bute is far from right. Justin McCarthy is Parliamentary and historian, but only good in the second capacity. Ten to one, had he been the opposite of Parnell's criticism of him as a politician, his treatment of Courtly things had been much poorer. William O'Brien's novels are read for the politician's sake, not for that of the writer. Politico-*littérateurs* cannot have it both ways—when in office, make money out of politics ; when out of office, dish up into paying prose the *stale dregs* (I am but Demosthenean) of Parliamentaryism. Perhaps the ideal man, in such cases, is he who is of a literary stock, but thrust into Parliament for his sins or for those of his forebears. This ideal man one day sees that his bent is to writing only. That day he rises in the House of Commons and valedictorily tells it that he wills not "*propter vitam vivendi perdere causam*:" contrariwise, he will write. And this ideal man does now write and writes ideally.

## XXXVI.

### Lacépède, Cuvier, Balzac, Dumas père.

IF my digression is not in order, I pass on with all contrition to the scientists and novelists. Above, we have seen something of Buffon and his "style." **Lacépède** (1756—1825) tried to do for Buffon what some ill-advised folk have even attempted for Gibbon, aped his manner of writing. A caricature may please, but conscious and serious imitation of a difficult system of composition rarely succeeds. One has not, for an illustration, to go further than R. L. Stevenson's *St. Ives, continued and finished*. "Ce qui frisait l'impossible devient absurde." So Lacépède has been attacked by some, and damned with faint encomium by others, for his interpretation of the "pompous Buffon" rôle. Natural History Cuvier is another literary man, as well as Comparative Anatomist. Leopold Christian Frédéric Dagobert Cuvier, dit **Georges Cuvier** (1769—1832) was anti-"Descent" in theory, and could say so in good French. Whether he was wrong or right did not affect his prose. Energy, depth, breadth of view made him recognise that the organism is a unity, parts of which sympathise one with another. His "types" have been confirmed by the independent work of others. A Linnean, he was wrong, but he put his faults so well that one is sorry so much good writing rests on a false basis. He over-simplified Nature's



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complexity in words so well chosen that they really should have been reserved to elucidate a correcter system. *Leçons d'Anatomie comparée* (1801—5), *l'anatomie des mollusques* (1816), *recherches sur les ossements fossils des quadrupèdes* (1821—4), *histoire naturelle des poissons* (1824—49), *le règne animal distribué d'après l'organisation* (1817), *Discours sur les révolutions du globe* (1821). Education was not alien from him, nor politics. Of course, he visited England in 1818, and, of course, he was well received. Louis-Philippe made him a baron just a year or so before he died of paralysis, in 1832, but he was saved being Minister of Interior.

*Les romans, les contes et les nouvelles.* Such is yet another little list to deal with rapidly in this Century's literature. The *Martyrs*, *Delphine* and *Corinne*, *Atala* and *René* seemed to give the new Jahrhundert a spice of ante-Revolution times. The public, that myriad-headed Beast, revelled in its old absurdity, the making and reading of many books, several so "thin" that their name outlived their authors but a bare twenty or thirty years. In such cases a hierarchy becomes difficult to determine, and we can only avoid deceiving ourselves by naming the writers almost *per saturam*. Thus, who shall decide on the priority of, say, Balzac, Dumas *père* and George Sand? Does Xavier de Maistre take the *pas* of Prosper Mérimée, and why? Did Toeppfer, writing when he was forty-two, outshine his master, Charles Nodier, born in 1780, and publishing in the Thirties? In the above queries, too, I am supposing the impossible, the comparison of disparates. But the reader is provoked in this way every day.



## LACEPEDE, CUVIER, BALZAC, DUMAS

The begetter of the *Comédie humaine* can begin. He was the Mark Twain of his time, as regards, not humour *extra sec*, but unfortunate business speculations. With Balzac and Sir Walter Scott and Mr. Clemens everyone must have had and have every sympathy. **Honoré de Balzac** (1799—1850) was thirty when *Les derniers Chouans* made him a little known. *La peau de chagrin* made him a little more known. Becoming more and more celebrated among his contemporaries, he thought out a scheme as impossible as it was grandiose, a Vanity Fair, of Bunyan rather than of Thackeray, an all-embracing "Human Comedy," a comedy in the ordinary and in the Dantesque senses. The dry bones of imagined peasants or peers, poor parents or ladies of thirty summers, strainers after the absolute or wrecks of lost illusions, of persons in every phase of life—Town and Country alike—are clothed with the warm literary flesh of probability, as if by Defoe himself. Daniel and Honoré, between them, would almost cozen the elect, so near to us do they make their puppets, so living, so breathing. Detail abounds in Balzac. His pen anticipates all the latest cinematographic wealth of self-deception apparatus. By the very nature of things—especially the shortness of life—the *comédie humaine* had to be and remains unfinished. He were bold indeed who would essay to complete it in the vein and composition of its "begetter," so far forth as it is not misbegotten. But Honoré's *Contes drolatiques* (1833) show a special genius apart from his other work, a genius for assimilating and making the reader inwardly digest the true spirit of the XVI. Century. Who among us can write

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in Biblical style, especially such Biblical English style as is prior to the Jacobean Revision? I trow, few indeed. And French à la Rabelais is surely as hard as imitating, say, the oldest English in *Job*. Even Ruskin could hardly have done it, for all his learning by heart the Good Book itself as a child; for all his being steeped in Hooker and "those about Hooker"; for all Max Nordau's singing *Placet* on the prose of that "Torquemada of Æsthetics." The gift of expression Honoré de Balzac had to a high point. Balzac's very imperfections are signs of life. "All things are "literally better, lovelier, and more beloved for the imperfections which have been divinely appointed, that "the law of human life may be effort, and the law of "human judgment Mercy." And Balzac's was real effort: fifteen to eighteen hours a day; eighty-five novels in twenty years; more labour on his "proof" than on his original "copy." Like Charles Reade, he was never enriched by his pen. Feuillet and Zola claim him as their master. "Every one in Balzac—to the very scullions—has genius." So Baudelaire, and his words need repeating on every occasion.

A "sapper" like Balzac, and worse, was the quadroon, **Alexandre Dumas** (Davy de la Pailleterie, 1803-70). To give a list, only superficially exact, of the works by a man who poured out books "like sparrow-bills," would perhaps have puzzled even his son. Certain Germans know, perhaps. Adapting *Hudibras*, one might say that for Dumas *père*

Of books the writing was as facile  
As for a blackbird 'tis to whistle.

## LACEPEDE, CUVIER, BALZAC, DUMAS

Of course, he stole like a Spartan boy. He dictated, too, or vamped, or wrote what was illegible to all but a Secretary, who put in the verbs or corrected the spelling. Four score and ten amanuenses were left on the road during Alexandre's life journey. He was as rough with Gaillardet and Maquet, quilldrivers extraordinary, as the great Gounod was with Mrs. Georgina Welldon. Edmond About says Alexandre "took from everyone "everywhere everything." All he signed was very far from being his, but all he signed was full of his *esprit*. In other words, he seems to have acted as the Montesquieu of the prose he fathered. Homer—or a Book of the *Iliad*, rather—escaped the distinction of being signed by Alexandre Dumas, whatever Alexander Pope may have done with a certain "pretty "poem." But Trelawney *was* swallowed up by the collected works of de la Pailleterie. Starting in 1829 with *Henri III.*, and finding that the Master of the Mignons was a theatric success, Dumas scored again with *Antony* (1831). *La tour de Nesle* is still a French sign on French sign-boards. Like the spider, he seemed to spin all these plays of his, *Mme. de Chamblay* and her congeners, out of his (mental) viscera: they grew from airy nothings and a tearing passion. His impressions of travel must have been too much, often. Why will people write of their travellings? Voyages are as plentiful as French grammars (though Max O'Rell once knew an *émigré* who had indited none, in London). In 1842, 1843, Dumas discovered the Mediterranean: Oscar Wilde, we all remember, was only disappointed at the Atlantic. Some believe the author of *Le Caucase* (1859) really went there,

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though we know where the "No. 5 John St." gentleman was when believed to be fishing the Caspian. His ten years—*decennium mirabile*—of first-class novels were 1844-1854. *Monte Cristo*, *Les 3 Mousquetaires*, *20 ans après*, *Maison-Rouge* are among them. *Les Mohicans de Paris* closes a fine series. Besides, he dramatised his best historical novels. Perhaps the funniest incident in the Dumasian annals is his appointment by Giuseppe Garibaldi as Director of Pompeii excavation. For the same reason that the Iceland Snakes chapter was short, one's description of Dumas' morals, veracity, literary conscience, modesty and good taste is not unduly prolix. Prodigal, giving away everything, humane—he was never guilty of striking below the belt. *Trop souvent ivre de puissance* George Sand calls him, and says he was excellent at heart. Like Sir Walter Scott in fertility and choice of subject—virtues of chivalry—he got together and welded in perfection all the trappings and trappings of that joy for ever, Knight-errantry. **A. Dumas fils** (1824-1895) touched fiction, drama, art, morals, politics, religion—with success. *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848) is, perhaps, his best known *pièce*. He dramatised in part, it is understood, some of George Sand's novels. His Parisian mother neutralised in him his father's character to an appreciable degree. His paradoxes and morality are too obtrusive. He is *too* exact. He apparently believed in his own literary immortality, when he was in the act of writing. His wit is bitter. His style is chaste.

## XXXVII. Edmond About, de Banville, Baudelaire.

AN authority on Alexandre Dumas *père* was Edmond Francois Valentin About, born in Lorraine in 1828 and, as a "German subject," imprisoned by Bismarck's people in 1872. He died in 1885, just after his election and before his admission into the Académie française. Cardinal Mezzofanti attacked the Modern Greek as a language and Edmond About wrote, about 1853, *La Grèce contemporaine* and, some three years later, *Le roi des montagnes*, of which the former is a satire on and the latter a description of the then Hellenes. *Les Grecs* and Edmond made acquaintance when he was archæologising at Athens. Accused of playing the *grec* with his *Tolla Feraldi* (alias, perhaps, *Vittoria Savorelli*), he lay low until his *Mariages de Paris* in some sort rehabilitated him. *Germaine* came out in 1857 and *La vieille roche* in 1865. His fantastic tales of slit ears and notaries' noses are very popular (1862). After the Old Guard—Lamartine, Victor Hugo, Guizot, Thiers, George Sand, Sainte-Beuve, and a score or so beside—About is a mere mannikin; but his *Roi*, if no more, will probably live as a fresh and graphic description of such exploits as now find their theatre in Macedonia or on the mainland opposite the Island of Corfu. It is not long since I was going to Constantinople by rail through the Balkans and found the train had to be freighted with Turkish troops at the frontier, owing



## THE STUDY OF FRENCH LITERATURE.

to the danger from brigands, Greeks, that were kinging it in the neighbourhood. Often they hold Europeans to ransom. They so held an Englishman lately at Smyrna. And the Turks pay the money, because these "Greeks of the slavery," as they call themselves, are Turkish subjects. As for Edmond About, who, except for purposes of Teuton imprisonment, was a thorough Frenchman (of the pre-*Entente* days), his Anglophobe *malice* is pretty enough. Speaking of the Seven Greek Islands, of which Gladstone was the last High Commissioner before they were "freed" from us and handed over to the present Danish King of Greece, About rails at Hellenic ingratitude. Greek employés, he writes with all the eloquence of an admirable style, receive so much a month, and their English equivalents in the bureaux only three or four times more, and yet the miserable Hellenes are in no way grateful. They even, it transpires, used to pick off a British soldier nightly or so, for British autopsy next day. But these are sad themes. I turn willingly to **Théodore de Banville** and Baudelaire. Théodore is one of the smaller or feebler folk among Romantic mighty men. *Caryatides, Stalactites, Rimes dorées, 36 ballades joyeuses, les exilés, les occidentales, odes funambulesques, comédies, esquisses parisiennes, contes pour les femmes, contes féeriques, mes souvenirs, petit traité de poésie française, dans la fournaise*—such are the chief jewels sparkling in the crown of this "roi des rimes." This King of rhymes, that a wicked and perverse generation (without the fear of Austin Dobson before its dull eyes) would call a *jingler*, has shown endless ingenuity. His rhyming is like perfect



## EDMOND ABOUT, DE BANVILLE.

skating, curves and turns and figures. Ballade or rondeau or rondel the old world called what de Banville has done of late once more. Dobson and Andrew Lang have followed in his train and done much the same or similar still more recently. They have done it, too, in English (with a dash of Scots, it may be). As a critic, de Banville has been more praised for his *abundantia* than for his *judicium*.

On the contrary, subtle criticism is a forte of **Charles Baudelaire** (1821-1867). *Fleurs du Mal*, *les paradis artificiels*, *Opium et Haschisch*, *l'art romantique* (occasional essays), *petits poèmes en prose*, *œuvres posthumes*, *correspondances intimes* sum up most of this sombre, keenly intellectual thinker's work. This has, as its chief hall-mark, "finish," in the full sense of the word. There is not much, but the little—comparatively little—prose and poetry is unique in its way. At this point the reader may imagine that the day of small things is upon him, but I must ask him to read yet a little further. Certainly, in France, if we outsiders, who proverbially see more keenly than those in the game, may claim a hearing, decadence has set in. The spirits of the Cynics and lewder Epicureans dominate Gaul's latest literature. And literature has gone back, accordingly. Similarly, in Italy, a healthy and really national literature languishes from a refined lack of Nature, a certain *morbis virorum* (non-Horatian). The victorious Teuton is less successful now than before: Goethe followed by Sudermann and Hauptmann is a chronological sequence that makes, in criticism, for *laus temporis acti*. Our own state is not,

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of course, parlous, but far from satisfactory, at the moment. The French literary decadence can be readily explained on Ruskin's system: confusing art with literature and both with morality. Moral and spiritual beauty appealed to John Ruskin more than cleverness. If then (which I do not allow) to write well spiritual and moral loveliness is necessary, we have the low state of French—and other—letters fully expounded. To show it, I take the case, still not treated, of Prosper Mérimée.

## XXXVIII. "Carmen" and "Mdle. de Maupin."

SCEPTIC son of an unbelieving father and of an unbelieving mother, **Prosper Mérimée** (1803—1870) was melancholy with the constitutional melancholy of absolute infidelity. His self-distrust, his distrust of others deadened his action, deadened his writing. To him, *ex hypothesi* surrounded with Nothingness, the world could but make parade of unsubstantiality. His days were but dreams; Hope was there none, but cynicism abounding. And, in the meantime, the man's physical nature was buoyant, even—it may be—enthusiastic. But he killed the surging impulse, and, in killing it, was so far suicidal. This way madness lies, or—at least—sadness. And Prosper was very sad. How far are we here from Ruskin's standpoint of living by loving (Mérimée did love children and the *Inconnue*, but would not confess to it even to himself), by hope, by admiration, by reverence for the glorious dead and gracious living and grand immortals! "All great art is praise," preached Ruskin. "The gods are dead, have never existed," lamented Mérimée, and his successors extol his saying. And as they extol, they fall lower and lower in the scale of excellence in writing. For such composition, good, nervous, rare convictions are required, if religion can be omitted; a subject worthy of clothing with trappings that force the attention to them. And it is a poor centre of a

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man, Himself. If there is no Ideal, nothing but eating and drinking to-day and dying to-morrow, let us die by all means, but not write, prose or verse, French or English. Let us, ere we put pen to paper, posit an Ideal, or an Idea of Plato—the Great Idea—and write up to it. Writing down to dead levels of lowest conduct, to Zolaism in realism, is not the better part, even if the writer's remains go eventually to the Panthéon. Pornography and scatology weigh as dust in the balance against printed lessons of justice and charity, of responsibility realised and higher morality laws applied to social questions. Mérimée had nothing *outré*. He was *espiègle*, he put his portrait of himself dressed as a girl as frontispiece to his *Clara Gazul*, which surname becomes *Guzla*, two years later, in 1827. He has exact and wide information, irony and humour; he is *prosateur des prosateurs* in the best sense of the word *prose*. A *dilettante* or *amateur*, real or pretended, he did write learned books as well as others. But his tales are the best things he did, and of these the best-known is *Carmen*. Is he his own "Saint-Clair" in the *Vase étrusque*? *Lettres à une Inconnue* (1873) are curious and interesting. Here the cynic melts into love, or into its substitute in the less impressionable. An attempt to solve the fair one's identity were useless, as were the endeavour to prove to non-Spaniards that *Carmen* should read *Carmencita*. With Prosper Mérimée none but **Théophile Gautier** (1811-1872) can dispute the palm of writing short stories. In describing him I must be very exact and serious, lest haply I be taken to have read any of him, and so be thought foul scorn of by the sterner sort of

## "CARMEN" AND "MDLLE. DE MAUPIN."

moralists. For there are regarding Gautier two great schools of thought, one praising him unduly and one very hard on him for his supposed lack of manliness and religion. Truth, as usual, lies between. That is, such truth as we can get at. He is not an idol, he is not a devil. Nobody need worship him, none need cross himself when he is mentioned. On the "Art for Art" principle, Théophile has no beliefs, no religion, no faith. His ideal is, probably, *peccare*—not *fortiter* but *τεχνικῶς*. One cannot always be sparkling and naughty, but Théophile Gautier was always trying. If he was ever good and not flippant, it was in connexion with Victor Hugo. Before he put on that half-belief in the great Romanticist, he had made Sainte-Beuve notice him. *Émaux et Camées* (1856) is one of his good sets of poems. Especially, perhaps, *Nostalgies d'Obélisques*, *Le monde est méchant*, *Les Néréides*, *Le château du souvenir*, *L'Art*. The famous novel, *Mlle. de Maupin*, defied the World and its wife in 1835. *Le Capitaine Fracasse* appeared in 1863. His *voyages* are what such books should be, unless they are out-and-out Baedekers. They should tell nothing, know nothing about the Spirit of Laws in places like Stamboul. Or they should omit nothing absolutely, whatever be the department of knowledge, to an exhibition of which the country may lend itself. "Doing" a continent, or any part thereof, with a German guide-book is pain (and one's duty to oneself), the same with Gautier is pleasure (and self-deception). A work should evidently be praised for its omissions, especially a work calling itself literary. On the same principle a friend of mine took care to reach Persepolis

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after nightfall, and left the ruins before sunrise. Ever after, he could discourse impartially and at any length on what he thus visited. We know, too, how true to life Moore was on Persia, which he never saw, in his *Lalla Rookh*. [Only Pierre Loti, possibly, can fill 350 pages with a description of seen sun, sand, moon and shrubs (in *Le Désert*).] To take Gautier's *feuilletons* on the theatre seriously would be not well. Recently Catulle Mendès had the Gautier mantle, and prophesied (retrospectively) with *éclat*. Still that was not his *genre*. And Gautier's *Histoire de l'Art dramatique en France* bears but a relation infinitesimal to the huge promise in the title. Gautier, furthermore, discussed in his own vein the XVI. and XVII. Century writers, besides *Honoré de Balzac* (1858). This seems *à priori* a large order, but he was equal to anything, that man of Tarbes, not so far from Toulouse; and we know what is a Gascon's Gasconing. We know, too, what is their courage—the bravery of those same men touching whom that same H. de Balzac, in his *Contrat de mariage*, writes: "ce courage physique qui semble "être dans l'air de la Gascogne."



## XXXIX.

### A. Daudet and Flaubert.

AFTER the Gascon, the Meridional Type. *Tartarin de Tarascon* (1874), *Tartarin sur les Alpes* (1886) and *Port Tarascon* (1890), in the comic vein, as *Numa Roumestan* (1882), in the serious style, make ever known among us the name of **Alphonse Daudet**, of Nîmes and *not* of the Académie, which his *L'Immortel* (1888) attacks powerfully under the thinnest of disguises. His *Le Petit Chose* shows up the French lycée *pion*, who had been partly abolished, it seemed, by the Education Department, but has again been resuscitated in his primal misery under another name. Alphonse Daudet was *pion*, or *surveillant* or *répétiteur* at a school at Alais. We know the lashing Paul Bourget—in *André Cornélis* (1887)—gives the system of *répétiteurs*, or whatever *pions* were called in his (already distant) schooldays. We know Daudet's sufferings. The sufferings of the French boys under *pions*, to-day even, are not small. British ideas of freedom and *amour propre* and straightforwardness and openness are absolutely unknown in the *lycées* and the *collèges*, where boys are more watched night and day than any British young girl in any boarding school. The Daudets, Alphonse and Ernest (his brother), on going up to Paris, were made secretaries to *Le Nabab* (M. le duc de Morny). Alphonse published poetry in 1858, *Les Amoureuses*; did theatrical work, e.g., *l'Arlésienne* (1872); wrote in the *Figaro*.

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In 1873 he made an onslaught on that feeble folk and defenceless, the *ratés*, in *Jack*, as sad in its way as is Ouida's *Signa*. At least, in my memory they assort themselves strangely and sadly. One pities Jack's mother, though one should not (for "the sin forgiven" by Christ in Heaven by man is cursed alway," Willis tells us). One is wild with Bruno for spoiling *Signa* and himself reaping his due reward, ingratitude. In 1883, *l'Évangéliste* presents us with what was then new or newish, the Salvation Army. *Sapho* (1884) was different from the usual run of Alphonse's books. *Trente ans de Paris* was published in 1887 and, two years later, *Souvenirs d'un homme de lettres*. His son, León, a novelist, has written a memoir of him. His brother, Ernest, was also a novelist and journalist.

Alphonse, for some time, was member of a famous literary coterie which included also Turgenief, **Flaubert** and the brothers Goncourt. (Turgenief was Russian, and may be left out in these Notes). The coterie was, say some, realistic (Flaubert was not realistic). The coterie, say others, affected naturalism (Flaubert was not naturalistic). Flaubert's detail (and full description) was never an end-in-itself to him. Minuteness was subordinated to his general plan. Flaubert was a romanticist. He was born out of due time. On him, as on the Glaucus of Plato, were certain accretions, caught from later writers, as Balzac, as Stendhal. The chamœleon is blue, you swear now ; now you are sure it is green. A. asseverates that *Madame Bovary* or *Salammbô* is of one school, B. that *Salammbô* or *Madame Bovary* is of another. Flaubert is competently esteemed the most remarkable novelist

## A. DAUDET AND FLAUBERT.

of his epoch (1821-1880). *Madame Bovary* was published in 1857; its style, being Flaubert's, is impeccable; and impeccable, according to the judges, are its morals. Others had thought the contrary. *Salammbô* (1862), now playing in Paris, has been threshed out in every accent, in every clime, in every lady's chamber. How can a man decide upon it? An Irishman of my former acquaintance solved the difficulty in this wise. He read a Magazine article on this tale of old Carthage, and fairly assimilated the views written therein. He then went to a Dublin lady's, where local light and leading were literarily engaged. And the Dublin Hôtel Rambouillet was astonished at his learning. Howbeit, later, certain ladies knew him for what he was, a *blagueur* not unspotted of the sin of plagiarism. In Gustave Flaubert has been remarked "a strong and somewhat morbid" cast of thought. He is known, also, to have been very late in life a producer. Probably there is causality between these two facts (assuming their truth). A child born to old parents, or to a married couple of whom the husband is old, is often lacking in health or good temper. A kind of weird, eerie feeling, a shadow of a great terror, so to say, permeates or overspreads *Salammbô*. Flaubert, by his "wrestled" expression, seems to the impartial reader like him who walks a lonely road, nor durst turn back his head, aware as he is of the "fearsome fiend." The author of this study of Punic waning days had learned his lesson too well. His topography, his knowledge of the times were too perfect. How much better is the Koran, describing as in this same Tunis country (perhaps) Alexander

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the Great (if it was he) seeing the Sun setting near black mud (supposing the Arabic to mean that). The Philosophy of Doubt, à la Montaigne or Mr. Arthur Balfour, is preferable generally to the accurate, the painfully accurate, man that insists on knowing Dido's exact relationship to Jezebel. And when this kind of information multiplies itself—Flaubert is prolific in such merciless facts—your joy in the story evaporates in disgust at fullest detail. Of his *Trois Contes* one deals with the daughter of Herodias. We have had her quite lately, also, from the pen of Oscar Wilde, and with the music of Strauss: Catulle Mendès, the Parnassien and author of *Mephistophéla*, has praised her. Flaubert's way of depicting her depicts his own mannerisms. Our Walter Pater has been—for style—mentioned together with Flaubert.

One way of judging Flaubert's work is that of Emerson, when he has Goethe before him for judgment. "It is so crammed with wisdom, with knowledge of the world . . . ; the persons so truly "and subtly drawn . . . the book remains ever "so new and unexhausted, that we must even let it "go its way, and be willing to get what good from it "we can, assured that it has only begun its office, and "has millions of readers yet to serve." Flaubert has what most French have, that on which they pique themselves, intellectual brilliancy, valuable *per se*; sprightliness; talent almost overloaded, but not so as to conceal the possessor's wisdom. His correspondence with George Sand has been noticed before. Its publication was a boon to literature, and made for a juster appreciation of both writers.

## XL. Paul Bourget, A. France, E Zola.

THIS time a living prose writer, who has also written good verse. **Paul Bourget** was born in 1852, brought up at Clermont-Ferrand lycée, where his father was professor of Mathematics, and took highest honours. *La vie inquiète* came out in 1875, *Édel* in 1878, *les aveux* in 1881. His *Essais* (first series), in 1883, and *nouveaux essais* (2nd series)—in 1886—search the very hearts and reins of Pessimism in the France of to-day. "Have We created the heavens and the earth, "and what between them is, in jest?" cries God, in the Koran. Bourget, in the above and in his novels, e.g., *l'Irréparable* (1884), *Cruelle énigme* (1885), *un crime d'amour* (1886), *André Cornélis* (1887), *Mensonges* (1887), probes human nature and taps its springs of motive, clearly and with refinement analysing our very souls, as it would seem. His brother-in-law—a Professor, like his father, but at a University—confessed to me that he found Bourget very dull reading and had given up perusing him. This dullness exists. Since his "conversion," especially, he is wondrous High and Dry in his Catholicism. Besides, his Professor critic is entirely literary and, almost more English than the English, is now busy on "John Lyly and his times," soon to appear, in French. Bourget is responsible for much more than the above—among others, *Sensations d'Italie* (1891), *Cosmopolis* (1892), *Le disciple*, *Notre cœur*, *La terre promise*, *Un Saint*,



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*Un scrupule, Une idylle tragique, Un Divorce* Like his sister and her husband, Paul Bourget knows England well and Italy intimately. He has travelled in America, Spain, Morocco, etc. His U.S.A. impressions were printed in 1894, when he was admitted into the Académie. Bourget did not commit the error of S. T. Coleridge, that of "wearing away his youth in "contemplation, with the end of poetising in his man-hood." He got his poetry off his chest before he was 30. As Poe combated the corruption of Poetry by "the heresy of the Didactic," so perhaps that of the novel by the same may be justly attacked. We also nowadays can feel the deepest reverence for the True, but wish to limit, only to enforce, its modes of inculcation. "The demands of Truth are severe. She has "no sympathy with the myrtles." The Ancients placed her in a well. Is Bourget justified in dragging her out, and again thrusting her into a novel, however didactic? If he is justified, he certainly has no right to be heavy. That, like mediocrity, which he is the last to be thought to have, is permitted by neither Gods nor men nor editors.

Another living force in poetry, novel-writing and miscellaneous authorship to-day is **Anatole France**, born in 1844. In 1868, he gave the world his views of *Alfred de Vigny*, followed by his *poèmes dorés* (1873). *Le crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* made him well known in 1881, since when he has continued with stories, sketches, satires. *La rôtisserie de la reine Pedauque* is much spoken of: so is his last work—or almost his last—on Jeanne D'Arc. France's attack on the *Pucelle*, under his pretence of being *documenté*,



PAUL BOURGET, A. FRANCE, E. ZOLA.

is exceedingly clever, but deceives nobody who has watched French literature and its trend during the last few years, as has, for instance, Andrew Lang. *Style clair, nuancé, ironique* is that of Anatole France, *né Thibaut*.

Professor Saintsbury considers **Emile Zola** "the most celebrated, if not the best, French "novelist of the last quarter of the XIX. "Century," and esteems "*La Terre* the beastliest of the whole [of his books], unless that "proud pre-eminence be allotted to *Germinal*." *Nana* is the "success of scandal." Apart, however, from Zola's "Naturalism" and beastliness, matters of taste and, as such, incapable of dispute, his books are overloaded with encyclopædic knowledge, surfeited with technicality, stiff, inartistic. This, then, is a crime against æsthetics, and *hoc habet!* Immorality, bestiality, lubricity—what not? are small things, perhaps. But the moment the æsthetic and artistic are touched, it is a home thrust: Zola has offended against the canons of writing. Like Piron, he was not an Academician. His *Contes à Ninon* (1864) and *Nouveaux Contes à Ninon* (1874) belong to his earlier and better style. Some consider these quite his best work. Accidentally asphyxiated in 1902, Zola was lately canonised laically and his remains transferred to the Panthéon. But this, presumably, had nothing to do with Zola, the writer; Zola, the politician, was thus treated, in all probability—a probability accentuated by the riots.



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